

AN EXPLORATION OF THE MARITAL PREFERENCES OF HETEROSEXUAL
COLLEGE-EDUCATED BLACK WOMEN: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION

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Abstract

The present study sought to examine the marital preferences of college-educated, heterosexual, Black women between the ages of 25 and 34. This sample of women had never been married but had a desire to become married in the future. Participants shared their marital preferences, their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences with finding a marriage partner and their perceptions of marriage difficulty. Data were analyzed using a grounded theory method in which several themes emerged. The results of this study outlined the key personal qualities that the participants desired in a marriage partner, in addition to their racial, educational, and socioeconomic preferences. Results also revealed the attitudes and views participants have about Black men and the various challenges and factors they believe impact their marital status. Implications and directions for future research are provided.

Keywords: African American women, marriage, college-educated, marital preferences

An Exploration of the Marital Preferences of Heterosexual College-Educated Black Women: A Qualitative Examination

According to Dixon (2009), African-Americans tend to be the least likely to get married compared to other racial groups. When African-Americans do marry, they marry later in life, and compared to White Americans, spend less time married and are more likely to divorce. A number of cultural, individual, and interactive factors are believed to contribute to this issue. There appears to be a discrepancy between the number of available African-American men to marry and the number of African-American women who are seeking marriage (Dixon, 2009). This discrepancy in the male to female ratio within the African-American population can make the pursuit of marriage challenging for African-American women compared to women of other racial groups.

Davis (2009), a correspondent with ABC News *Nightline*, compiled a segment that examined the topic of African-American women and marriage. The segment discussed the high prevalence of single college-educated Black women and reviewed the question of why some successful Black women were unable to find a man to marry (Davis, 2009; Johnson, 2010). The news segment emphasized a finding from a Yale study stating that compared to 23% of White women; the percentage of Black women who have never been married is 42% (Johnson, 2010). Unfortunately, the Yale study in question has not been properly cited, as the researchers of this study appear to be unknown. However, Nitsche and Brueckner (2011), from Yale University, reported that 47% of highly educated Black women had never been married. This sample of women had some form of graduate education, were born in the 1960s, and were between the ages of 35 and 44.

Stanley (2011) argued that Black women have been the focus of what has been referred to as a “marriage crisis”. Harris-Perry (2013) discussed that this suggestion of a “marriage crisis”

began when *Nightline* aired a segment on the topic of Black women and marriage titled “Why Can’t a Successful Black Woman Find a Man?” In her book, she referenced the news segment’s claim that because 70% of professional Black women were not married that a crisis existed.

Although this notion may be true, Harris-Perry noted:

Nightline failed to call on any sociologist, psychologist, historian, or therapist who could have contributed context, statistics, or analysis about the “marriage crisis” among African Americans. Instead, these delicate and compelling issues were addressed by comedians, actors, bloggers, and journalists. Without structural analysis or evidence-based reasoning, the panel relied on personal experience (p. 291).

Malone-Colon (2007) argued that a Black marriage crisis does exist due to a decline in marriage rates and a decline in the quality of Black marriages. She further emphasized that along with a decline in marriage rates, “the rates of divorce, separation, cohabitation, out-of-wedlock births, and children residing in female-headed households have increased” (p. 1). This in return has lasting and negative effects on the Black population, their communities, and society as a whole, making members of the African-American population at increased risk for financial and economic problems, as well as social, psychological and health problems (Malone-Colon, 2007). Given Harris-Perry’s (2013) critique of the lack of scientific evidence to define a marriage crisis within the African American community, this study presents an examination of the research on Black women and marriage, focusing on the marital preferences of college-educated heterosexual Black women. Additionally, this study seeks to understand their experiences with finding a marriage partner.

College-Educated African-American Women and Marriage

Marriage trends point towards a decreased likelihood for Black women to become married compared to their White and Hispanic female counterparts (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Nitsche and Brueckner (2009) found that “Black women are twice as likely as White women to never have married by age 45 and twice as likely to be divorced, widowed, or separated” (pp. 1-2). They analyzed data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey for the period of 1970 to 2007 to describe marriage and family trends among Black women with postgraduate degrees. They found that fewer Black women with postgraduate degrees are getting married and having children. Overall, they argued that marriage and family are on the decline for highly educated Black women (Nitsche & Brueckner, 2009).

Additionally, research findings have indicated that Black female college students when compared to White and Hispanic female college students have similar attitudes regarding “having it all” (i.e., career, marriage, and family), with the majority of subjects reporting a desire to study beyond the bachelor’s degree, as well as a desire to be married career women, and/or married career women with children (Bronzaft, 1991; Porter & Bronzaft, 1995). These findings suggest that the low marriage trends for Black women may not be due to an unwillingness to marry.

Research findings have also noted that Black women reported that their most fulfilling dating experiences were with Black men, with the majority of Black women indicating that they did not date men from other racial/ethnic groups and were most willing to marry Black men (Porter & Bronzaft, 1995). Additionally, King and Allen’s (2007) survey of African-American men and women found that “both African-American men and women seek well-educated, financially stable, monogamous, and affluent partners who were spiritual, religious, self-confident, and reliable” (p. 570).

The notion of a shortage of “marriageable” Black men has been presented in the literature to explain the low marriage rates among African-American women (Dixon, 2009; King & Allen, 2007). King and Allen (2007) noted that “marriageable” was defined as “men who possess the social or economic characteristics that Black women seek in a marriage partner” (p. 571). The shortage of “marriageable” Black men phenomenon has been explained by factors such as the sex-ratio imbalance, with significantly more African-American women being represented in the U.S. compared to African-American men (Davis, 2009; Dixon, 2009; Johnson, 2010; King & Allen, 2007). The underrepresentation of Black men in higher education has also been mentioned as an additional factor with Black women outnumbering Black men in higher education, decreasing the chances of college-educated Black women finding a partner who is similar to them educationally (Marriott, 1990; South & Lloyd, 1992; *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2007; Tucker & Taylor, 1989).

With African-American males constituting the majority of the prison population and accounting for a large percentage of the unemployment rate, incarceration and unemployment are other possible factors contributing to the shortage of “marriageable” Black men (Dixon, 2009; King & Allen, 2007). Finally, with Black women being less likely to date outside of their race compared to Black men (Banks, 2011), it has been argued that the decline in marriage rates among Black women has coincided with an increase in the interracial marriage rates between Black men and non-Black women (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000). Crowder and Tolnay (2000) claim that interracial marriage can impact the marriage pool for Black women, resulting in “marriageable” or socioeconomically attractive Black men being removed from the pool of eligible partners.

The above literature points to factors such as the sex-ratio imbalance, the underrepresentation of Black men in higher education, high incarceration and unemployment rates, and an increase in interracial marriage among Black men, as possibly contributing to a “marriage crisis” for Black heterosexual women who desire to marry. With these identified variables, this study seeks to understand the phenomenon surrounding the declining marriage rates for heterosexual never-married African-American women who are college-educated.

Statement of the Problem

The 2009 U.S. marriage statistics revealed disproportionately high percentages for the number of Black women who have never been married compared to women of other racial groups (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Additionally, the 2014 National Survey of Family Growth revealed that 26% of Black women are married, compared to 44% of White women and 45% of Hispanic women (Center for Disease Control & Prevention, 2014). These figures highlight the discrepancy in marriage rates based on race. Additional studies appear to suggest that the low numbers of never married Black women may not be due to an unwillingness to become married. Results from two studies have shown that a majority of Black female college students, 89% and 73% respectively, have a desire to become married career women (Bronzaft, 1991; Porter & Bronzaft, 1995). Despite the fact that these two studies were conducted over 20 years ago, no recent literature could be found to suggest that this is not the case today; the low marriage rates could be due to something other than a lack of desire to become married.

If Black women desire to be married as suggested by the available research, then what variables contribute to Black women being unmarried? Overall, it is argued that the issue of marriage among college-educated Black women is largely due to a shortage of “marriageable” men, sparked by a sex-ratio imbalance amongst African-American men and women in the U.S.

population (Davis, 2009; Dixon, 2009; Johnson, 2010; King & Allen, 2007). It has also been suggested that an underrepresentation of Black men in higher education (Marriott, 1990; South & Lloyd, 1992; *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2007; Tucker & Taylor, 1989;), along with the large number of Black men who are incarcerated and unemployed (Dixon, 2009; King & Allen, 2007;), and Black men marrying outside of their race (Banks, 2011; Crowder & Tolnay, 2000) all contribute to the decreased marriage availability pool for Black women. These factors can create a problem for Black women when there is evidence to support a preference of Black women marrying Black men (Banks, 2011; Porter & Bronzaft, 1995) and Black women being less likely to date outside of their race (Banks, 2011).

According to Kalmijhn (1998), homogamy theory proposes that people will be most attracted to those who are from similar social and cultural backgrounds. This includes race, age, ethnic background, religion, socioeconomic status, political views, and physical characteristics. Additionally, individuals tend to marry those who are similar to them socially and culturally (Kalmihn, 1998). There are strong benefits for marrying people who are socially similar to oneself, as Brynin, Longhi, and Perez (2008) found that homogamy is a key factor in marriage and partnership, and homogamy within a partnership tends to reduce stress levels. This theory can provide a perspective for understanding why one may believe a “marriage crisis” exists.

If college-educated Black women who desire to become married prefer a partner who is similar to them racially, educationally, and socioeconomically, the shortage of “marriageable” Black men argument suggests that college-educated Black women may outnumber the Black men they seek to marry. Homogamy theory helps illustrate the impasse college-educated Black women may face when attempting to find a preferred marriage partner, as a dichotomy appears to exist between what Black women desire and what is realistically available.

Additionally, the declining marriage rates could have health implications for the overall well-being of Black women, especially those who desire to become married. Borzumato-Gainey, Kennedy, McCabe, and Degges-White (2009) found that married or partnered women in general had higher levels of life satisfaction compared to single women. Furthermore, Coombs (1991) found that married men and women tended to be happier, healthier, and less stressed than those who were not married. There is additional support in the literature suggesting a relationship between decreased life satisfaction and an increase in poor mental health outcomes. Specifically, individuals who have experienced long-term life dissatisfaction were more likely to develop mental health concerns, particularly, major depressive disorder (Rissanen et al., 2011).

Although these findings are not true for every married individual, it puts into perspective the potential mental health implications for Black women who want to get married but do not have an available pool of preferred partners to draw from. It is possible that Black women who desire to be married and have yet to find a partner may be at risk for decreased life satisfaction, as they lack the companionship of a partner to assist them in coping with physical and emotional distress (Coombs, 1991). When Black women desire to become married and are unable to find a preferred partner, this may create feelings of confusion, inadequacy, and a loss of sense of purpose and fulfillment. These feelings, in turn, may increase their levels of life dissatisfaction and loneliness, in turn impacting their levels of distress. It is important, then, for counseling psychologists to understand and be prepared to ask questions about marital desires and expectations when working with this population.

Reflecting on physical and emotional distress and health, there are a number of health disparities between African Americans and other racial groups. Fongwa et al. (2008) discussed the high prevalence of hypertension among African American women, which is the leading cause

of heart disease and stroke among African American women. In addition to factors such as poverty, poor diet and other health behaviors, it is also believed that environmental factors play a role in the high prevalence of hypertension among Blacks, such as stress (Fuchs, 2011).

Additionally, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) presented the notion of “shifting” in their African American Woman Voices Project. They described shifting as a change that occurs amongst Black women in which they shift “White” and shift “Black” throughout their lives in order to avoid negative bias and bigotry. Ultimately, “shifting” may occur when Black women feel pressure to adjust and hide their true identities.. Relating their research to the present study, their participants consisted of primarily heterosexual college-educated Black women. The researchers assert that Black women spend significant energy dealing with racial and gender bias, especially in the workplace; “shifting” among Black women in order to fit or survive their environment can trigger negative health outcomes such as hypertension, obesity, and depressive symptoms (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Keeping this in mind, this information suggests that Black women could benefit from some of the health-related and protective benefits associated with marriage; their decreased likelihood to marry could negatively impact their health and well-being.

Finally, Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1998) argued that it is not marriage alone that is important, but the quality of the marital relationship. This notion puts into perspective the importance college-educated Black women may place on their preferences in a partner. During Davis’s (2009) *Nightline* segment the question was raised as to whether this population’s standards were too high? One interviewee stated: “I kind of have certain standards that I hold myself to and I don’t feel like I should have to settle on those for the sake of having somebody. I’m willing to wait” (Davis, 2009). If college-educated Black women are not able to find their

preferred marriage partner, it could impact the quality of their relationships and become problematic in terms of their marital and life satisfaction. On the other end, some Black women may stand firm on their preferences in order to improve their chances of having a quality relationship with someone who is similar to them on a number of facets. Ultimately, the inability for this population to find a desired marriage partner has implications for the future of the Black family.

Future research is needed to further examine the marital preferences of college-educated, never married, heterosexual Black women and address this population's viewpoint on the issues that are contributing to their current marital status. This is important because the literature is limited on the concerns of this population. There are also other general questions to consider:

1. Are there relational dynamics between Black women and Black men that are impacting the low marriage rates?
2. What attitudes do Black women hold about Black men and men from other racial groups and how does this impact their marriage prospects?

This information could be vital for developing appropriate counseling and/or community interventions focused on addressing the declining marriage rates within the Black community and the implications this issue has on the lives of Black women, as it encompasses various aspects that could be contributing to the "marriage crisis" and are overlooked.

Additionally, the overall literature on this topic tends to be outdated, calling for a need for more current research. Of the existing studies, some tend to examine the perspectives of Black female undergraduate students; therefore, considering developmental and current stage of life differences, examining the experiences of Black women beyond the undergraduate level would be beneficial. The existing literature also tends to be conceptual and theoretical, with

assumptions on what might be going on for Black women, with a limited examination of the problem from the perspective of college-educated Black women. This study is designed to address this void in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the marital preferences of heterosexual college-educated Black women who have never been married and who desire to become married. This study also sought to explore the factors this population believes contributes to their marital status. Overall, the current study sought to understand the perspectives of college-educated Black women who have never been married in relation to the “marriage crisis” in order to gain a better understanding of the issue and expand on the existing research.

Significance of the Study

This study will add to the literature on the complex issue of college-educated African-American women and their marital prospects. An exploratory investigation on the marital preferences of college-educated heterosexual African-American women was conducted. Based on the extant published literature, the present study sought to enhance the existing literature by adding a more up-to-date study and examining the “marriage crisis” from the perspective of college-educated Black women. A qualitative design was implemented in order to give this population a voice that has been absent from the literature and to help understand the experiences and challenges college-educated African-American women may face when trying to find a marriage partner, as this concern could have negative consequences on overall life satisfaction, mental and physical health, and the future of the Black family.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What qualities do college-educated Black women who have never been married prefer in a potential future marriage partner?
2. What general attitudes do college-educated Black women who have never been married have about Black men and marriage?
3. What factors do college-educated Black women who have never been married believe contribute to their single marital status?

The previous research questions were addressed through a qualitative research design approach in order to add to the limited research on college-educated African-American women and marriage.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, terms were defined as follows:

African-American/Black. This term is defined as an individual who racially identifies as African-American and/or Black. For the purpose of this study, these terms were used interchangeably throughout this dissertation to refer to individuals who identify as members of either population.

College-educated. This term refers to individuals who have obtained at least a bachelor's degree.

Heterosexual. This term refers to individuals who are sexually attracted to the opposite sex.

Marriageable. King and Allen (2007) defined “marriageable” men as possessing “the social or economic characteristics that Black women seek in a marriage partner” (p. 571). This definition will be used to define the term marriageable throughout this study.

Never married. This term refers to individuals who have never been married. This term was used instead of single, in order to control for women who may identify as single in terms of their marital status, but may also be divorced, separated, or widowed.

Method

Given the research questions that the primary investigator sought to address, a qualitative methodology was deemed most appropriate. This study sought to explore and better understand the phenomena related to African-American women and their marital prospects, and a qualitative methodology allowed the primary investigator to understand the complex issues in the participant's lives and to gain their individual perspectives (Wang, 2008). Data were collected through a face-to-face semi-structured interview method, which allowed for an exploration of the views, experiences and beliefs of individual participants.

The primary investigator conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to allow participants to discuss their experiences and opinions on the topic. The interviews were transcribed and coded by a research team using a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory allowed the primary investigator to generate a theory of the process being examined based on the views of the participants (Creswell et al., 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Overall, the study sought to generate a theory to help explain the marital preferences of college-educated Black women.

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 11 women ranging in age from 25 to 31 years old. All participants lived in North Carolina within the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area. They each identified as African-American and/or Black, as well as heterosexual and had never been married. Each participant had obtained at least a bachelor's degree and indicated a desire to get

married to a man in the future. Table 1 further summarizes the demographic information for each participant.

Table 1

Participant Demographics				
	Age	Relationship Status	Highest Level of Education	Occupation
Participant 1	31	In a Relationship	Doctoral Degree Obtained	Postdoctoral Researcher/Fellow
Participant 2	26	In a Relationship	Master's Degree Obtained	Student Affairs/Higher Education Professional
Participant 3	29	Engaged	Currently Enrolled in a Doctoral Program	Statistician
Participant 4	31	Single, but Casually Dating	Doctoral Degree Obtained	Psychologist
Participant 5	25	Single, but Casually Dating	Master's Degree Obtained	Student Affairs/Higher Education Professional
Participant 6	28	Single, but Casually Dating	Doctoral Degree Obtained	Postdoctoral Researcher/Fellow
Participant 7	29	Exclusively Dating Someone, but no committed relationship at this time	Doctoral Degree Obtained	Postdoctoral Researcher/Fellow
Participant 8	25	Engaged; Has 2 children	Bachelor's Degree Obtained	Teacher
Participant 9	27	Single, but Casually Dating; Has 2 children	Bachelor's Degree Obtained	Teacher
Participant 10	26	In a Relationship	Currently Enrolled in a Doctoral Program	Graduate Assistant
Participant 11	29	Single	Currently Enrolled in a Doctoral Program	Researcher

Procedure

The primary investigator conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 11 participants, who were recruited through snowball sampling methods. The primary investigator sent out a recruitment email (see Appendix A) to potential participants that were known to meet

the inclusion criteria. To participate, participants had to identify as African-American and/or Black, be a female, identify as heterosexual, and had to have never been married. Participants also had to have obtained at least a bachelor's degree and want and/or have a desire to get married to a man. The recruitment email was also sent out to individuals who were identified as being able to provide referrals.

Participants were recruited and lived in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area. The Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area is also known as the Research Triangle Park or "RTP." It was recognized as a "Best Place to Live" and "Best for Business" and is known for its many businesses and Fortune 500 Companies. The Research Triangle Park is also well known for its contributions to research and development and education with numerous colleges to pursue for higher education such as North Carolina State University, Duke University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, to name a few. In 2015, the population consisted of approximately 2.3 million, with a median household income of around \$68,000, with the age ranges of 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54 tying to each make up 14% of the population. In 2015, the racial demographics for the area were approximately 66% White, 22% Black, with the other 12% consisting of individuals who are of Hispanic Origin, American Indian, Asian or Pacific Islander, or Multiracial. As of 2010, 55% of the population was married, 30% was never married, with 10% being divorced and 5% widowed (Research Triangle Region, 2016). This area was selected based on accessibility in order for the primary investigator to conduct the research. The selected area was also based on demographics for finding the desired population as this location was listed in the top 20 metro areas with the largest African-American populations (BlackDemographics.com, 2010).

Recruitment emails contained an internet survey to complete a demographic questionnaire for individuals who were interested in participating. Prior to completing the survey, participants were asked to provide informed consent (see Appendix B). The primary investigator used the results of the demographic questionnaire to ensure that potential participants met the inclusion criteria prior to participation. The demographic questionnaire included an option for potential participants to provide contact information and participants who met criteria were contacted by the primary investigator to arrange the location, date, and time that the interview would take place. Interviews took place in public areas within the Raleigh-Durham Chapel Hill area, such as libraries and at participant work offices.

Participants were asked a set of questions, which were developed by the primary investigator based on the literature on the shortage of “marriageable” Black men and college-educated Black women’s marital preferences. The development of the interview questions were also guided by the research questions. Face-to-face interviews lasted about one hour and were audio-taped. Prior to the start of the interview, all participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix C) agreeing to participate in the study and to be audiotaped. In general, the conversations with participants were engaging. All of the participants appeared comfortable sharing their stories, but there were some participants who appeared to be more open when answering the interview questions than others.

Instruments

The measures that were used in this study consisted of a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D) and semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix E).

Demographic Questionnaire. On the demographic questionnaire, items were about gender, race, age, sexual orientation, marital status, relationship status, current educational

standing, occupation, and desire to get married. Prospective participants were also asked to provide their name, email address, and phone number so the primary investigator would have a way to contact them if they are selected to participate. Potential participants were also asked 2 questions regarding their beliefs regarding marriage difficulty. Questions were not used to screen participants but were used as a means of collecting data regarding their opinions on the topic. One question asked, “How would you rate your overall difficulty of finding your preferred marriage partner?” with the option to select extremely difficult, very difficult, somewhat difficult, or not difficult at all. The second question asked, “Do you think it is more difficult for Black women to find a preferred marriage partner than it is for women of other racial groups?” with the option to answer Yes or No. Given the format in which the questions were asked, it was deemed most appropriate to be asked via the demographic questionnaire; however, follow up questions to these responses were asked during the semi-structured interview to obtain additional data and will be discussed further during the results section.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions. Interview questions consisted of 11 open-ended questions based on the literature on the shortage of “marriageable” Black men (Banks, 2011; Bronzaft, 1991; Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Davis, 2009; Dixon, 2009; Johnson, 2010; King & Allen, 2007; Marriott, 1990; South & Lloyd, 1992) and college-educated Black women’s marital preferences (Bronzaft, 1991; Porter & Bronzaft, 1995; Banks, 2011). The development of the interview questions were also guided by the research questions. Interview questions were developed based on the research questions the primary investigator sought to answer and were later piloted and revised as necessary. The primary investigator piloted the interview questions with 3 women who also met the study’s inclusion criteria. Interview questions were revised in a manner to facilitate participant openness and clear understanding of questions. These questions

addressed areas relating to marital preferences, contributing factors to the participants' current marital status, as well as general attitudes about Black men as potential marriage partners.

Research Team Demographics and Perspectives

The research team consisted of the primary investigator and 6 additional members. The 6 additional members consisted of 3 individuals who made up a team of transcribers and 3 individuals who made up a team of coders. The team of transcribers involved 2 Caucasian females and 1 Caucasian male, all of whom were graduate students in the sport and exercise psychology and counseling master's program. The following outlines information pertaining to the team of coders, such as demographics, knowledge of the topic and population under study, as well as thoughts on the research findings at the conclusion of the study.

Primary Researcher. The primary investigator is an unmarried 27-year-old African American female from North Carolina. She is currently a Doctoral Candidate in Counseling Psychology and desires to become married in the future. As a person who identifies with the population under study, she has personal experiences relating to life as a heterosexual college-educated Black woman and has had numerous interactions and has formed relationships with women who are similar to the women who participated in this study. Prior to the beginning of this study, the primary investigator assumed that members of this population would prefer educated Black men as partners and identified various challenges she believed this population faced on their journey to the altar. This was not only based on her personal marital preferences and dating experiences, but based on casual dialogue she has engaged in with other heterosexual college-educated Black women who were family, friends, and acquaintances prior to the beginning of this study. She was aware of the statistics on Black women and marriage and the idea of there being a limited number of available Black men for this population to marry.

Given this information, she was cognizant of possible confirmation bias and continued to remind herself to let the participants' voices guide the results without interference from her own perspective. She wrote down her thoughts after each interview focusing on components of each interview that resonated with her, as well as aspects that took her by surprise. During the interviews there were moments where she held back from expressing certain comments and non-verbal communication, attempting to remain objective, when she found herself personally relating to aspects of the participant's views and stories. Although her story and view was not the same as each participant there were moments where she found herself thinking "Wow" and "Me too" as they shared their stories.

When meeting with the team of coders to discuss themes and repeating ideas, she consulted with the group to verify that they heard similar themes and repeating ideas in order to prevent possible situations of letting "what she thought she heard or maybe wanted to hear" from clouding "what was actually said." A master list of themes and repeating ideas was prepared and the team agreed upon the final list that they believed represented the participant's responses. This was another way she sought to avoid confirmation bias and ensure that the participants voices were guiding the results as opposed to her own opinions and experiences.

At the conclusion of the study, she was most surprised at how the majority of these women had obtained education beyond the bachelor's degree and they were willing to compromise on the level of education their future marital partner had obtained. Despite how much the desire for education meant to them, their future partner having formal education appeared to be viewed as a bonus, not a requirement. Additionally, although the "competition amongst Black women," stereotypes about Black women, and societal views regarding Black

women and beauty standards were not new to her, she was surprised at how often these ideas were mentioned by the participants as being additional key barriers to finding a partner.

Coder #1. This member of the research team is a 44-year-old Caucasian female from Wyoming. She has been married for 21 years to a Caucasian male and they have two children together, ages 15 and 18. She has obtained her doctoral degree and had previous experience with heterosexual college-educated Black women through her relationships with friends, students, and colleagues. She has several friends and colleagues who are heterosexual college-educated Black women, some who are married to Black men, some who are married to White men, and a few who are single and would like to eventually become married. She was not aware of the lower marriage rates for this population, but suspected that not all of them married within the Black population, since there might be fewer eligible, educated Black men available. After participating in this study she indicated she realized to a much greater extent how challenging it would be for this population to marry when the "pool" of available Black men grows smaller and smaller as age and education increases.

Coder #2. This member of the research team is a 23-year-old Caucasian male from Michigan. He desires to get married in the future and is currently in a committed relationship with a Caucasian female whom he has been dating for over one year. At the conclusion of the study, he and his partner were both completing their master's degrees and both were expected to begin doctoral programs after graduation. He noted outside of talking to members of this population in class and seeing them occasionally outside of class, he had minimal experience with heterosexual college-educated Black women. He disclosed how prior to participating in this study, he was unbiased as he was not aware of the research regarding this topic; however, he predicted educated Black women would have more trouble sustaining relationships. After

participating in the study, he described the participants as a committed group of individuals that seemed comfortable with pursuing their career goals. He pointed out how he believed many of them felt like they lost opportunities to date through pursuing an education, which was unfortunate, as he believes one should not have to choose between a relationship and an education.

Coder #3. This member of the research team is a 22-year-old Caucasian female from Indiana. She desires to get married in the future and is currently in a committed relationship with a Caucasian male whom she has been dating for approximately 6 months. She is currently a graduate student pursuing her master's degree and her partner's highest level of education is a high school diploma. In regards to her previous experience with heterosexual college-educated Black women, she identified having one close friend in undergraduate school, but noted minimal experience outside of that relationship. She had no previous knowledge of this research topic and assumed this population would desire to date within their own race based on what she has observed across the board with most races. After the research with this population concluded, she described how she really felt their pain. She believes women are usually pressured to get married and the dating options become more limited the higher one climbs in the world of education. She described how she personally does not understand the added difficulty this population faced due to race, but disclosed how it helped inform her understanding of their worldview.

Data Analysis

The first step of the data analysis process involved transcription of the interviews, which was conducted by the team of transcribers. Each transcript was checked with the audio recording by the primary investigator to ensure accuracy.

Data were analyzed through the open, axial, and selective coding phases of grounded theory, which was conducted by the primary investigator and the team of coders. This process of coding allowed the researchers to explore the data and look for similarities and differences in order to find themes. In order to form these themes the data were sifted through thoroughly and compared in order to form the appropriate themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Fassinger, 2005; Walker & Myrick, 2006). All coders had previous experience with qualitative research and were trained and provided instructions on how to identify main ideas, themes, and important quotes that emerged throughout the interview transcripts and were provided with an article to read on grounded theory methodology.

In the open coding phase, each response was compared with the other responses to identify similarities and differences, which were then grouped into themes and often resulted in new themes being developed when new information emerged. During the open coding phase, team members examined comments line-by-line, looking for certain phrases, individual words, whole sentences or even paragraphs, asking themselves "What is the major idea?, why does this seem important or relevant?, and what about this seems important?" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Fassinger, 2005; Walker & Myrick, 2006). The team of coders were provided with the research questions and reminded to keep them in mind throughout the coding process and consider what might be relevant.

The axial coding phase involved understanding the relationships between the various participants' responses in order to form key themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Fassinger, 2005; Walker & Myrick, 2006). The primary investigator noted the various ideas that appeared throughout the open coding phase and combined ideas that appeared and reappeared into a master document in order to begin sorting the information into themes. This master document of

themes, ideas, and supporting quotes was reviewed by the team of coders to assure that research members agreed with the final list of themes and ideas.

The last phase, selective coding, consisted of integrating the data from a “core” theme in order to form one central hypothesis or theory, which was compared to the data so the theory was grounded in the participants’ experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Fassinger, 2005; Walker & Myrick, 2006). A theory was developed as a way of understanding the experience being studied.

Qualitative Research and Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed how trustworthiness is essential to qualitative research and should be evaluated through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria were utilized to assist with evaluating the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility. Credibility was achieved through triangulation and peer debriefing. Triangulation of sources was utilized as coding responses were checked for consistency, assuring that the team of coders heard similar repeating ideas from the participants, but also allowing for a thorough understanding of the data through multiple perspectives. For peer debriefing, coders worked individually while coding data, then, worked together to combine results and make decisions regarding the results and interpretations, which were discussed and agreed upon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability. Information regarding the participants’ education levels, professions, and relationship statuses were included to provide background information on them as single, college-educated women who have a desire to get married. This information was provided to assist with better understanding the population and how the results can be applied to other situations and populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability. Information on the methodology was provided in a manner that would

allow for future researchers to repeat what was conducted if desired (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability. Triangulation of sources is also included during this evaluation phase and was used as coders worked together to make sure the results represented the participants' true experiences as bias, assumptions, thoughts, and expectations were discussed. As previously discussed, since the primary investigator identifies with the group being studied, she engaged in reflexivity as a way to become self-aware throughout the research process. The primary investigator recorded her reactions, thoughts, bias, and expectations in relation to the interviews and coding process and consulted with the team of coders as a way to increase self-awareness and remain neutral throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

This section outlines the key findings and various themes and repeating ideas that emerged after engaging in a grounded theory approach to data analysis. As previously mentioned, on the demographic questionnaire, participants were asked questions regarding their opinions on the potential barriers to marrying a preferred partner. When asked "How would you rate your overall difficulty of finding your preferred marriage partner?," 6 participants (55%) noted that it was "somewhat difficult," 3 participants (27%) indicated that it was "very difficult," 1 participant (9%) endorsed that it was extremely difficult and 1 participant (9%) indicated that it was not difficult at all. During the interview participants were asked to elaborate on their answer and their responses are reflected in this section. Additionally, participants were asked, "Do you think it is more difficult for Black women to find a preferred marriage partner than it is for women of other racial groups?" Ten participants (91%) answered "yes" and only one participant (9%) answered "no." Possible explanations for these responses will also be discussed during this section.

Major Findings

The participants in this study shared powerful narratives that gave voice to their minority status and their experiences with desiring a marital relationship. The following outlines the major findings that were specific to the research questions.

Qualities of Potential Marriage Partners. The most commonly endorsed qualities that participants preferred for their marriage partner to possess consisted of faith/belief in God, honesty, good communication skills, ambition, and someone who values family and relationships. The majority of participants (64%) preferred to marry a Black and/or Black American man. Of those 7 participants, 4 (57%) were not interested in considering dating/marrying outside of their race at the moment, while the other 3 participants (43%) were willing to date/marry outside of their race if they were unable to find a Black man to marry. Four participants (36%) had no racial preference in a marriage partner.

Table 2

Racial Preferences and Supporting Quotes	
Racial Preferences	Supporting Quote(s)
No racial preference	<p><i>"It [race] doesn't play any role because actually my fiancé is White and my kids, both of my kids are mixed...he's actually the first Caucasian guy I've dated...and he'll be my last guy (laughter)...so it doesn't really play...you can't help who you fall in love with."</i></p> <p><i>"I don't really have a preference. I've dated, well all the people I've dated are Black and White, so I haven't dated other than that, so I don't necessarily say I have a preference but I haven't been approached by, I guess any other race."</i></p>
Prefer a Black man and I'm unsure about dating/marrying outside of my race	<p><i>"I don't even think I envision or even think about race not that it doesn't play a role, but in my mind I'm marrying a Black man."</i></p>
Prefer a Black man, but	<p><i>"I think I prefer Black men but I've also never seriously dated a</i></p>

I'm open to other races	<i>person outside of my race, only because and it's not because I'm not open to it, but I've never had anybody seriously be interested in me who was from another race."</i>
Prefer a Black American	<i>"If there are Black males, they're not American, and that's also like an important thing to me.... culture is a big thing. Black Americans are like popular opinion. Now we do have a very distinct culture so if I was willing to date like a foreign Black person, I'd be married already but you know, I'm not."</i>

Additionally, 36% of the participants preferred that their ideal marriage partner had at least a high school diploma, while another 36% preferred at least a bachelor's degree. Of the remaining participants (28%), one preferred a post baccalaureate degree, while the other participants had no educational preference. What seemed to matter most to the participants with no educational preference was their partner's ability to provide, learn, and have ambition. It is important to note that educational preference seemed to be influenced by a number of factors. While some participants indicated their educational preference, they appeared willing to compromise as some indicated that having some college experience and/or being hard working and desiring to learn and grow would suffice. Finally, the majority of the participants (55%) indicated that their marriage partner's socioeconomic status did not matter as long as he could financially contribute to the household.

Table 3

Educational and Socioeconomic Preferences Supporting Quotes	
<i>"I think that a lot of men, especially Black men can get intimidated if you're very educated and especially since I went ahead with a terminal degree, so, I mean at least a college degree."</i>	
<i>"I said something that's very important to me is for the person to be a learner and to just love learning. And so, it doesn't necessarily have to be in the formal sense, you know higher ed, it doesn't have to be a post doc like me... but some level of education, or some desire to learn and improve oneself."</i>	
<i>"I think that nothing can replace a college experience. I think there are some common things that we can share so it is important that they've had some college experience, you know just little</i>	

things like understanding all nighters or you know understanding roommate dynamics or different things that come with the traditional college experience. I think it just makes it a little bit easier to connect.”

“Yea I was looking for somebody who did something beyond a bachelor’s degree...I always knew that I wanted to go back to grad school and I wanted to be with someone who did some sort of professional, something beyond the bachelor’s like, could be law, could be business, could be medical, something.”

“I would like to...at least a man to be stable....and to be able to contribute. I don’t have a problem with making more money than him...I guess it’s not that important as long as you have a job and you’re stable and you can contribute.”

Attitudes about Black Men and Marriage. Results indicated in general Black women had positive attitudes toward Black men as marriage partners. However, the majority of the participants (64%) perceived Black men as being less likely to settle down and commit to marriage.

Factors for Single Status. Table 4 outlines four themes that emerged based on the participants’ responses. Three of the four themes (Limited Availability of Partners, Undesirability, and Career/Educational Challenges) relate to heterosexual college educated Black women’s experiences with finding a marriage partner and beliefs regarding marriage difficulty, while the last theme (Strong Attachment to One’s Black Culture, Identity, and Values) is specific to understanding the role race played in finding a marriage partner, specifically for those participants who preferred a Black man. Each theme is accompanied by the various repeating ideas associated with each theme. Quotes to support each repeating idea are also presented to assist the reader with gaining a better understanding of the results and to enhance the narrative and voices of each participant who shared her experiences, thoughts, and beliefs. A master list all of the repeating ideas mentioned by the participants in reference to this study, in addition to supporting quotes, can be found in Appendix F.

Table 4

Themes and Repeating Ideas	
Theme 1: Limited Availability of Partners	
❖	<p>Limited number of preferred/available men with similar education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I feel like there aren't a lot of men in my age range with like a similar background and similar goals in life that are still single.</i> <i>I also haven't had the experience of having a big pool of men who are who have master's degrees or who have you know attained education at the level or higher..... If I grew up in a world where there were many Black guys with master's walking around then that would be a different story but [laughs].</i>
❖	<p>Men/Black men not being ready for commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>A lot of men that I meet my age are either already spoken for or they're just not interested in settling down.</i> <i>I have found in the last three relationships that I'm ready, I'm ready, I'm ready to be serious and they're like "mmm not yet. You're great, you're awesome, but I'm not ready.</i> <i>It's hard for us [Black women] to find Black men that are ok with committing and settling down with just one person for the rest of their life....I'm sure there's still issues of infidelity in other races and ethnicities and that type of stuff, or you know issues of commitment and stuff like that but it just seems like, you know, I've heard, you know Black woman after Black woman talk about Black man after Black man and a lot of the themes that arise is that the commitment isn't there.</i>
❖	<p>Desirable men are already taken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>So I might go to like a minority post doc social and you see all these other men, Black men who have PhDs...but everybody has a ring.</i>
❖	<p>Belief that educated Black men are limited and in high demand, which creates competition for Black women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>But I have found, at least those men, a lot of them are not looking because they know that they are one of a few that are actually professional and make good money and so they are less willing to be in a relationship when they've got more women who are vying for them, so it becomes more competition.</i>
Theme 2: Undesirability	
❖	<p>Limited number of men who want to marry Black women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I think it's harder because some of the things that we've done to advance ourselves to develop personally have been really great but then I think that sometimes puts us at a disadvantage in terms of people seeing us as viable options to partner with.</i> <i>I would say that in my generation a lot of Black males don't like Black women.....There really aren't enough Black men that want to marry them. Just numerically there aren't that many.</i> <i>Black men will date, well they're dating and will marry Black women, but more and more are dating and marrying White women or outside of their race, which is fine, but other races are not dating Black women, more and more are dating and marrying Asian, Latino, and White women so then in terms of the numbers of men that we can date and</i>

find a partner with....there's just fewer people.

❖ **Never been seriously approached by someone from another race in terms of establishing a relationship**

- *I've been in a lot of predominantly white places, I've never had a white man come up and say something to me seriously like "oh can I take you on a date."*
- *I've never been approached by someone outside of my race either so I don't know if that would be...I don't know how I'd handle it if it happened, so right now it doesn't seem like that big of a deal but I don't know if I was actually in the moment, faced with having to make that type of decision if I would actually really think about it more.*

❖ **Observations of White peers becoming married and Black peers not getting married as often**

- *I go off of everybody that I graduated with, my class, from high school...Majority of the White girls, White females are married or in the process of getting married and the majority of the Black females are not.*

❖ **Stigma/stereotypes tend to make Black women less sought after; Black women not always viewed as attractive**

- *I don't feel currently that Black women are one of the highly sought after groups of people by other races....I think there are many more challenges because of media and stereotypes of Black women that maybe make people stay away when maybe they would have approached.*
- *Interracial dating happens less frequently between Black women and men of other races than if researchers looking at attractiveness and what people deem as attractive, we tend to be on the bottom of the barrel in terms of, at least in terms of what people articulate. Our characteristics and our traits are allotted as being beautiful, big lips and you know more, being more voluptuous, but in terms of who's getting married, Black women are chosen less.*

Theme 3: Career/Educational Challenges

❖ **Work/relationship balance difficulties; Often neglected relationships due to educational pursuits**

- *I know that personal relationships have taken kind of a back seat because of my educational pursuits...There was always stress from my partner's side where they felt as though I wasn't prioritizing the relationship.*
- *I never really even considered my academic pursuits as affecting my relationship status. I didn't understand why those two things couldn't always coexist and just be what it is. I didn't quite recognize or acknowledge that like yes once you put more effort into one thing, like there's only so many hours in the day right?, so if I'm putting more effort into one thing it's probably going to take away from the time I could put into something else and unfortunately that came at the expense of some relationships.*

❖ **Men not being supportive or understanding of my educational/career obligations**

- *They know it's important [education]. They're supportive to a point and then they realize how things have to change for me to get to that point and then that's when more things come up.....especially as I was moving closer to being finished, it became more tension. I broke up with my...well he broke up with me I guess like a week before my prelim.*

❖ **Educational pursuits limited options for meeting partners based on location**

- *I would say just maybe geographically as well as I think in Minnesota, it was a lot tougher to find men who were interested than it is in the South.*

❖ **Moving around to pursue educational/career goals; Feeling unsettled**

- *I think another thing that's impacted is just moving around so much. So when you're in academia usually each step of your career like college, you usually don't go to the same school for graduate school and you usually don't stay at the same place for your post-doc and you usually don't stay at the same place if you get a position. So I think moving around a lot has also been a barrier because just me feeling unsettled is part of the reason why I haven't been that motivated to make dating or making finding a partner a priority.*
- *Having been a graduate student I've moved around a lot...I didn't feel settled...then having to have long distance relationships.*

❖ **Educational and professional accomplishments often led to Black men being intimidated by my success**

- *When you add on Black women are becoming educated at higher rates than, at least Black men, and then maybe some of the challenges associated with some of the compatibility stuff that I talked about, you know where you asked me if I'm okay with dating someone who doesn't have or who just has a bachelors, but then the counter question that's really important is, is a man going to be okay dating someone who has a PhD? And so sometimes I think they're not ok with that so then that lowers the pool.*
- *As you finish your PhD and get closer and closer that intimidation starts, not on your end but for them, and then they become more insecure, and that's what I've noticed throughout dating specifically through my PhD.....So, they're kind of more stagnant and as you move forward and they can see, you know, you being successful whatever they envision....They feel like they'll be left behind or they're not kind of worthy enough in a sense to be with you.*

Theme 4: Strong Attachment to One's Black Culture, Identity, and Values

❖ ***Desire to avoid cultural differences and challenges in relationship***

- *I also would say I would encounter less friction dating a Black man than I would a White man in terms of, when I say friction I mean in terms of answering questions or people looking just because our society's not, everyone's not fully open to it. If I walk around with a Black man there's no questions asked, my family doesn't say anything. But if I walk around with a White man then there's questions asked or people might look some kind of way. And I think my family would be very accepting but there's definitely members of my family who would not be. So even being with a Black man right now it would be the path of least resistance.*
- *I think it might be harder for me to trust at a deep level, a partner who had not had....does not have some connection or understanding of my experience as a Black woman.*

❖ ***Black women are less likely to date/marry interracially***

- *At least from what I hear from my Black female friends, they limit themselves to only want to date within the same group.*
- *I don't think Black women's preference on interracial dating are gonna change. I think if they were willing to marry exogamously a little bit more, I think they'd all get married*

pretty quickly. I mean I think if I was more willing to marry out I'd probably be married already.

❖ ***Black men understand what it means to be Black***

- *They [Black men] understand what it means to be Black, you know. I have experienced discrimination or felt like I have and I think another person, a Black man, understands that more or would understand that more because they've been there themselves and I think other races you know, they understand it less.*
- *I think it might be harder for me to trust at a deep level, a partner who had not had....does not have some connection or understanding of my experience as a Black woman.*

❖ ***Most compatible with Black men***

- *I feel most compatible and complimentary with a Black man.*

Limited Availability of Partners. The limited availability of partners was a common theme as to why the participants believed they were still single. Participants noted that part of the problem was specifically due to a limited availability of Black male partners and being in competition with other women for Black men that are viewed as being in high demand. Given that the participants were educated, they also emphasized how there was a limited number of available Black men with similar education as them and highlighted how men who were desirable and had similar education tended to already be in committed relationships. Participants also reported experiencing a pattern of meeting men, specifically Black men, who were not ready for commitment, which also decreased their options for viable partnerships.

Undesirability. Undesirability appeared to be another theme pertaining to why the participants believed they were still single. The participants did not believe that they themselves were undesirable, but indicated how they believed Black men and men of other races perceived them to not be feasible marriage partners. They believed the issue of having a limited number of available partners encompassed having a limited number of men who actually wanted to marry Black women. Additionally, several participants (64%) noted that they had never been seriously approached by someone from another race in terms of establishing a relationship. Some

participants believed that Black women were not as sought after by other racial groups based on beauty standards of what is deemed attractive, and the various stereotypes about Black women. Participants also shared feeling as though their White peers were becoming married and their Black peers were not getting married as often, all of which led them to believe that maybe it was something about being a Black woman that contributed to their single marital status.

Career/Educational Challenges. Most of the women acknowledged that they struggled with work/relationship balance and their desire for education and a successful career resulted in an unbalanced life and less attention toward personal relationships. Their educational pursuits placed some of them in geographic locations that limited their options for meeting desirable partners and moving around in order to pursue their goals negatively impacted their ability to foster relationships. Additionally, some participants reported that past partners had difficulty understanding and supporting their educational and career obligations and noted that often their professional accomplishments would result in men being intimidated by their success. Overall, there were a number of perceived disadvantages associated with desiring a successful career and desiring a romantic relationship.

Strong Attachment to One's Black Culture, Identity, and Values. The narratives surrounding the reasons for this population's racial preferences were important to understanding the role race plays in finding a marriage partner for this population. Four of the eleven participants had no racial preference and did not express why race did not matter in their decision making process of who to marry. However, of the remaining women who preferred a Black man, their responses revealed a strong connection to their identities as Black women and a natural instinct to gravitate towards Black men. Some participants acknowledged that, in general, they believed Black women were less willing to date/marry interracial, which contributed to their

single status. For the participants who indicated a preference for marrying a Black man, they voiced that this was partly due to a desire to avoid cultural differences and challenges. They viewed Black men as being able to understand their experiences with being Black and therefore impacted their overall compatibility with Black men.

Other Important Findings

The following other major findings emerged from the participants' narratives. These findings were highlighted as they were identified as most commonly mentioned responses based on the various interview questions posed, but did not necessarily emerge as a theme. Additionally, one finding was emphasized to bring awareness into how the added factor of motherhood may impact the topic of marriage for members of this population.

- Marriage is a partnership and is valued based on a desire for lifelong companionship.
 - *“And of course nobody wants to grow old and alone by theirself [sic] and it's just that companionship, like having someone there that you can depend on and...basically like your better half.”*
- Most participants received pressure from society to be married and noted the pressure they received from others often implied a sense of inadequacy.
 - *“So from family, I've received that it's time, when are you getting married?, when are you having kids?, so I've received the message that a woman my age, I'm 31, so a woman my age should be married.”*
 - *“I will say that considering the way I was socialized I notice that whenever I'm home on holidays with my family and with the larger family they're expecting, well why isn't?, you know, is she broken?, like why isn't she married?”*
- Most participants were content with being single at this time, but several of them still desired companionship and acknowledged they would feel sadness and disappointment if they never married.
 - *“So I thought that if I had kept going in that trajectory [of not being married] I'd be sad, or you know kind of like not feel like I was as fulfilled....cause I'm almost 30, I turn 30 next month, and I'm not married, and I don't have kids and all those*

things, but I'm actually quite happy just because I've been in relationships and those relationships are over and I'm happy with the fact that they're over because they weren't for me, you know? And so, I'm just kind of really content with the way my life is."

- *"I don't think that not being married means I can't live and do the things that would be most meaningful to me. But I think there would be disappointment, I'll be disappointed, not think, I know I would be disappointed."*
- *"I'd probably be sad, because you know I just don't wanna...I wouldn't wanna date for the rest of my life. I would wanna have that person there you know to go to home to every night. I wouldn't wanna just date you know, I would probably be very sad."*
- The sample in this study consisted of two women who had children and their narratives gave voice to the population of college-educated Black women who are also mothers and how their role as mothers impacts their marital prospects and preferences.
- Some participants attributed their single status to personal work that needed to occur in regards to growth, identity, and maturity in order for them to be the woman they desired to be in a relationship.
 - *"I think I placed unrealistic expectations on my past partners to fulfill my emotional needs in ways that wasn't their job. So maybe some codependency, and so it's been really hard in the past because I've had to mature and grow into a space where I could get my own emotional needs met or meet them for myself or realize that my partner can't fill every void for me.....so I had to do some growth, I had to grow. I take ownership for some of it being very difficult because of my own need to mature and work through my own emotional challenges."*
- Finally, all but one of the participants expressed that they believed finding a marriage partner was more difficult for Black women than it was for women of other races.

Summary

Based on the abovementioned findings, in general, the majority of the participants preferred a marriage partner who was racially similar to them and having a strong attachment to their culture as Black women assisted us in understanding why race played such an important

role in their decision-making. However, having a marriage partner who had obtained educational and socioeconomic equivalence did not arise as a clear preference, but often presented as an area in which participants were willing to compromise. Additionally, comments relating to the limited availability of partners, perceptions of undesirability, and career/educational challenges helped illustrate why this population believed they remained single. During the next section, the theory that was developed based on these results will be discussed, in addition to further interpretation of the results and implications for the future.

Discussion

The topic of the declining marriage rates among African Americans, specifically heterosexual college-educated Black women, is often discussed throughout the media, but the research in this area is limited. As previously discussed, the literature on this topic has mostly evolved through media networks where individuals debate and discuss the issue based on opinions and personal experience, with minimal empirical evidence to support their claims. Therefore, this study sought to capture the "voice" of heterosexual college educated Black women and examine their marital preferences and factors they perceive as contributing to the lower marriage rates for heterosexual Black women. This study also examined their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences with finding a marriage partner, perceptions of marriage difficulty, and sought to add to the limited empirical literature on the topic.

Theory

Based on the findings from this study, the following theory was developed in order to help explain the marital preferences for heterosexual college-educated Black women:

Racial preferences. The racial preferences for this population appeared to be highly influenced by exposure. College-educated Black women who had experience dating men of other

racers tended to have no racial preference. Participants who possessed a strong preference for marrying a Black man appeared to have no prior experience with dating men of other races and/or had never met a man of another race who showed genuine interest in forming a romantic relationship with them. Therefore, racial preference for college-educated Black women appears to be influenced by the level of previous exposure and the likelihood that a Black woman can see herself marrying a man of a particular race based on information from past experience.

Additionally, college-educated Black women who preferred to marry a Black man were more mindful and concerned about the cultural differences and challenges that they would face if they did not marry a Black man. Having to deal with cultural differences within a relationship seems to be a deterrent for marrying outside of one's race.

Overall, college-educated Black women's racial preferences are impacted by their previous romantic experiences with men of various races and the importance they place on whether or not they are willing to deal with cultural challenges within the relationship. However, it is important to note that due to the limited number of available Black men, college-educated Black women may become more open to dating outside of their race as opposed to being single, especially if, after a given point and time, they are unable to find a viable Black partner. Additionally, a college-educated Black woman's level of tolerance in dealing with factors such as competition with women of all races for available Black men and the lack of commitment from Black men to marry also impacts their willingness to continue pursuing Black men as marriage partners.

Educational preferences. The majority of the participants in this study had obtained or were currently pursuing graduate level education, with a large percentage of them having doctoral level experience. Overall, the more education the participants had, the more education

they preferred in a marital partner. However, in general having a partner who had obtained at least a bachelor's degree was identified as a preferred minimum. Consequently, for this sample, the more education a Black woman acquired, the more she realized that the likelihood of finding a partner with equivalent educational attainment would decrease, especially if he was a Black male.

Although college-educated Black women view marrying a partner with equal education as a benefit, this appeared to be an area of compromise, especially if marrying a Black man was important. Therefore for most women in this sample, if marrying a Black man was important, his level of education would not necessarily be a barrier to marriage, especially if he was willing to learn, grow, and possessed other desirable qualities. College-educated Black women who prefer to marry a Black man may be more willing to compromise on their educational preferences due to the limited number of Black men with equivalent education that are available to them.

Socioeconomic preferences. Considering that educational attainment can be correlated with job opportunities and socioeconomic status, preferences for socioeconomic status centered around a man's ability to contribute to the household. Most of the participants were in careers where they were not making a lot of money themselves; therefore, level of income was not as important. When college-educated Black women have stable careers and are able to provide for themselves, the need for a man to provide for them is not viewed as a necessity. Participants who stated a preference for marrying a Black man noted that majority of the time they made more money than their previous Black male partners. Therefore, it is likely that if a college-educated Black woman desires to be married, her future partner's socioeconomic status is not viewed as a deterrent because of her ability to financially take care of herself. Additionally, it is not uncommon for this population to have a higher socioeconomic status than their desired partner,

especially if he is a Black male, so in order to obtain other qualities in a partner, socioeconomic status may be an area of compromise.

As previously discussed, in regards to overall marital preferences, homogamy theory proposes that people will be most attracted to those who are from similar social and cultural backgrounds. Although the majority of the participants preferred dating someone who was similar to them on various factors, there appeared to be an understanding that finding such homogamy would not be likely. Most of these women had already been making adjustments to their preferences (i.e. shifting) as a result of the changes in the dating pool for Black women and despite their efforts, they were still having difficulty. Research findings have offered suggestions for what Black women can do to increase their likelihood of marrying, but the issue of marriage patterns in the Black community is not an individual problem or a simple problem. Overall, homogamy theory continues to apply to the current study as the participant's responses reiterated a desire to marry a man who was similar to them; however, this study highlights how despite desiring homogamy, the population under study acknowledged the impasse they faced and were considering other alternatives that could lead to marriage in the future.

Implications

Previous research findings on this topic argued that the main problem surrounding the lower marriage rates for Black women was related to a shortage of "marriageable" Black men. Research conducted by Bronzaft (1991), Porter and Bronzaft (1995), and King and Allen (2007) discussed the marital preferences of college-educated Black women and identified personal qualities that this population viewed as important, as well as desire for a partner who is of the same race and of a similar background educationally and socioeconomically. Considering that

these studies were conducted 8 to 24 years ago, the present study sought to focus on this population's marital preferences to determine if these findings changed or remained consistent.

Based on this study's findings, having a limited number of marriageable Black men to choose from was a common experience for the participants. Additionally, the results of this study highlight that Black women experience a number of challenges with finding a marriage partner. Given these results, along with the disproportionately low marriage rates for Black women when compared to women of other racial groups, where exactly does that leave heterosexual Black women who have a desire to become married?

Understanding the challenges involved on a Black woman's road to marriage appears to be complex. Ralph Richard Banks published a book in 2011 entitled *Is Marriage for White People?: How the African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone*, proposing that the marriage dynamic will gradually change if Black women become more willing to marry outside of their race. Although Banks makes some valid points, his suggestion is inconsistent with the results obtained in this study and does not take into consideration that it is not always that simple for Black women. According to this study, the sample outlined various challenges involved with making the decision to marry outside of their race. A majority of the women in this study expressed their preference for a Black man, the reasons why marrying a Black man was important to them, and highlighted their beliefs on how men of other races view them, which may make marrying outside of their race challenging. Therefore, this study's results suggest that the level of ease for Black women to marry outside of their race is low; in other words there are other factors that one would need to consider.

Banks' (2011) suggestion for Black women to move towards marrying outside of their race taps into another experience that Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) explain as being

common for Black women known as “shifting.” In their research they described shifting as a change that occurs amongst Black women in which they shift “White” and shift “Black” throughout their lives in order to avoid negative bias and bigotry. Ultimately, “shifting” may occur when Black women feel pressure to adjust and hide their true identities. Relating their research to the present study, their participants primarily were heterosexual college-educated Black women. The researchers argued that Black women spend significant energy dealing with racial and gender bias, especially in the workplace; “shifting” among Black women in order to fit or survive their environment can trigger negative health outcomes such as hypertension, obesity, and depressive symptoms (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Everyone has the right to have happy and healthy relationships. Many participants in this study expressed how a lack of being approached by men of other races and a desire to avoid cultural differences and challenges influenced their preference for a Black male. Therefore, asking them to reconsider those preferences could result in unfulfilling relationships, which could impact overall health outcomes and life satisfaction.

African American women face a number of health disparities, with many suffering from hypertension, heart disease and stroke (Fongwa et al., 2008). Although these illnesses are influenced by lower socioeconomic status, poor diet, and poor health behaviors, there are a number of environmental factors, such as stress, that also impact the occurrence of these diseases (Fuchs, 2011). Marriage has been argued to be a protective factor as the companionship of a partner can assist one with levels of distress (Coombs, 1991). In general, research findings have found support for a number of health benefits that are associated with marriage and this population’s decreased likelihood to marry may influence their ability to gain some of the known benefits of marriage.

Averil Clarke published a book in 2011 entitled *Inequalities of Love: College-Educated Black Women and the Barriers to Romance and Family*, in which she argued that the issue of marriage for Black women is an inequality because some of the challenges they face with finding romance and being able to have a family are a result of systemic discrimination and racial inequality. She addressed how the barrier to romance impacts family formations, such as socioeconomic rewards and child-bearing decisions. *Nightline* reported that in regards to marriage “If you take 100 Black men, by the time you eliminate those without a high school diploma (21%), the unemployed (17%), and those ages 25-34 who are incarcerated (8%), you only have 54% of Black men left whom many Black women find acceptable” (Davis, 2009).

Based on these numbers, it is incumbent on society to examine the various barriers that may be negatively impacting Black men and potentially preventing them from having access to certain opportunities within various systems such as education, the workforce, and the criminal justice system. These barriers may be impacting the overall Black male to Black female ratio, which can decrease the likelihood of marriage for Black women who have a preference for marrying Black men. Based on the narratives of the participants of this study, there is also an issue of addressing negative stereotypes, racial bias, standards of beauty, and feelings of inferiority that may put Black women at a disadvantage in terms of being viewed as marriageable.

One qualitative study examined the opinions of married Black men, asking them why they believed that Black women were disproportionately single (Hurt, McElroy, Sheats, Landor & Bryant, 2014). Findings from this study indicated that poor gender relations between Black men and women, Black women’s difficulties with the way they go about attracting a man, Black male incarceration, the “strong, independent woman” attitude, and men not taking care of their

responsibilities were key reasons for the high prevalence of nonmarried Black women. Issues of trust, challenges with job stability, the view that marriage wasn't as valued, overall readiness from men and women to be married, and the prevalence of homosexuality between men and women were also mentioned as influential factors.

These findings, as well as the responses from the participants of the present study, suggest future research could focus on the development of marriage education and personal development programs for Black men and women (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Additional research is also needed on the perspectives of men on the topic of heterosexual Black women as potential marriage partners. With the help of psychologists and other mental health professionals, educational programs and other forms of development and counseling could improve upon trust issues between the genders, levels of readiness and commitment to marriage, and the various personality factors and attitudes about Black women that are impacting heterosexual Black women and their possible marriage partners. Based on research from the Black male perspective and the findings of this study, these areas appear to be agreed upon as barriers to singlehood.

Some of the findings from the perspective of married Black men combined with the findings from this study and previous research suggest that Black men and women agree that Black male incarceration, issues of trust, job instability, the value of marriage and readiness to commit to marriage are areas of mutual concern. However, comments from married Black men regarding poor gender relations between Black men and women, Black women's difficulties with attracting a man, and their "strong, independent woman" attitude suggest differences in perspectives between Black men and Black women regarding the perceived factors that are contributing to the disproportionately low marriage rates for Black women. Therefore, future research and programs should also examine the various challenges that each gender views as

being problematic and work to communicate those views effectively in order to improve upon the relational dynamic between Black men and Black women. Such research and programs could also determine where there is miscommunication and misunderstanding in order to identify other challenges that need to be addressed and better understand current challenges. This research could incorporate not only the perspectives of married Black men, but the perspectives of married Black women, as well as unmarried Black men and unmarried Black women. By understanding some of the overall underlying challenges for the target population, in addition to the relational dynamics and differing viewpoints from members of the Black community, psychologists and other mental health professionals can begin to learn how to prepare and work effectively with this population.

Adichie (2013) stated the following during her TED talk on being a feminist:

Because I am female, I am expected to aspire to marriage. I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. Now marriage can be a good thing, it can be a source of joy and love and mutual support, but why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don't teach boys the same?

This statement, in addition to the findings from the current study and previous research suggests that marriage is discussed differently with males and females in the Black community. More specifically, more work may need to be done to support and educate Black men about the value of marriage since participants in this study perceived them as lacking commitment and readiness to settle down. Therefore, this study also holds important implications for how members of the Black community might begin changing the dialogue about marriage in an effort to foster healthy, committed relationships for both men and women.

The above quote also highlights how women may be conditioned to value the importance

of marriage. This aligns with how the participants reported feeling pressure from society that they should be married and experienced questioning pertaining to when they would get married and why they were not married, which sent the message to some participants that something was wrong with them. Historically the institution of marriage has been viewed as the starting point for family formations. The expectation emerged that one would get married and soon raise a family and those who are married are often rewarded in society through various financial benefits. Although the participants in this study valued marriage and acknowledged its importance, their views, expectations, and decisions regarding marriage were changing based on their experiences. Marriage may have been an important goal, but if that goal was not achieved many participants would ultimately be content and place emphasis on other life goals, such as career and having children (see Appendix F), despite not achieving it in a “traditional” manner. I believe the results of this study emphasize how the construct of marriage is changing over time, as many of the participants tended to focus on career first, which changed the direction of their future goals relating to marriage, but overall, they appeared pleased with the paths they chose, even if it did not involve having a husband at this time.

Finally, for future study, following up with the participants in the current study could be beneficial to see where they are during a different stage of life and to determine if their perspectives and preferences surrounding marriage have changed.

Study Strengths and Limitations

One of the main strengths of this study was the use of qualitative methodology. Qualitative research allows for a richness of data collection that is not always available in quantitative work. This methodology assisted with exploring a construct that is fairly limited in the empirical literature and provided deeper understanding of a concept based on studying

personal experiences. Qualitative methodology creates an opportunity for the researcher to guide the interview and ask additional follow up questions based on what is provided in person. It gives the researcher a chance to attain information that may not be accessible during a quantitative study due to face-to-face interaction. Additionally, this methodology allows for more “Why” questions to be answered, which can provide more in depth information. Finally, the interviewer was also a strength to this form of methodology as she was able to build rapport easily with the participants under study, which likely aided in their willingness to share and provide detailed information pertaining to the topic.

Some limitations to this study consisted of issues relating to convenience sampling. All participants lived in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area of North Carolina, which was selected based on the convenience and accessibility for the researcher. There were also threats to external validity due to the small sample of 11 participants. Although this study sought to examine heterosexual college-educated Black women, the primary investigator decided to examine a more specific age group to avoid potentially confounding the results based on developmental and lifespan differences. Therefore, the findings of this study are not generalizable to all heterosexual college-educated Black women.

Researcher bias was also a limitation to this study as the primary investigator identified with the population being studied, which could have influenced the final analysis. However, the researcher worked with research team members who had no prior knowledge of the topic and helped to monitor her biases and perceptions in order to maintain the trustworthiness of the data. Finally, participant expectation bias was another limitation of the study, as a few participants mentioned that they had heard of some of the research and statistics on Black women and marriage, which could have impacted their responses.

Conclusion

The idea that finding a marriage partner is challenging is more than likely true for all women, especially educated single women of all races; however, this study suggests that heterosexual college-educated Black women believe it is more difficult for them to find a partner than for women of other races. Marriage statistics demonstrate that the marriage rates for Black women are low compared to women of other races, but this study was unique from previous research in that 91% of participants indicated that they believed it was more difficult for them to find a partner compared to women of other races. There are beliefs and various theories on why finding a marriage partner may be more difficult for Black women and this study provided empirical support for why Black women believe such a statement to be true.

This study examined the preferences, experiences, and beliefs of heterosexual college-educated Black women and offered support for the argument that part of the issue is a result of Black women having limited available partners of the same race and educational level. Previous research has examined the racial, educational and socioeconomic preferences for Black women in general, but this study focused on college-educated Black women and provided an update on the literature. Additionally, this study provided empirical knowledge on this population's reasoning behind their mentioned preferences, which does not appear to be present in previous literature. The narratives from this study also provided empirical evidence on the various challenges college-educated Black women have with finding a marriage partner, specifically educational and professional, in addition to findings on how not getting married in the future would impact them, all which appear to be unique to this study.

The findings of this study, combined with a critical evaluation of the research suggest that future practice and research should involve examining the various barriers in society that

may decrease this population's likelihood to form and maintain stable partnerships. Focusing on how negative views and stereotypes of Black women impact their levels of desirability would also be beneficial. More research is needed on the perspective of Black men and their views on the disproportionate number of Black women in order to identify challenges, relational dynamics, and additional viewpoints from the population many participants from this study have reported on preferring to marry. Finally, implementing programs to educate the Black community on marriage and healthy relationships, and assisting them with working through challenges and acquiring the necessary skills they need to be successful within the institution of marriage could be valuable.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Recruitment Email to Participants

Greetings!

My name is Lamarra Currie and I am a third year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology department at Ball State University. I am currently studying the experiences college-educated Black women have with finding a marriage partner. I will be conducting individual interviews in your area and would like to invite you to participate. The interview will last for one hour and will be audiotaped to ensure accuracy of the content discussed and will be kept confidential. The recordings will be destroyed one year after completion of the interview. To participate, you must be:

- African-American/Black
- Female
- Between the ages of 25 and 34
- Heterosexual
- Never Married
- Obtained at least a Bachelor's Degree
- Have a desire/want to become married to a man

If you are interested, please complete the following survey link:

After completion, I will contact you to arrange the location, date, and time the interview will be held. If you have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact me at any time. In addition, if you are interested I can inform you of the results at the conclusion of the study.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Lamarra M. Currie, M.Ed.,
Doctoral Candidate
Counseling Psychology
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47304
Telephone: (919) 740-2889
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Appendix B – Informed Consent for Survey Participants

Study Title An Exploration of the Marital Preferences of Heterosexual College-Educated Black Women: A Qualitative Examination

Study Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the marital preferences of heterosexual college-educated Black women who have never been married and desire to become married. This study also seeks to explore the factors this population believes contributes to their marital status.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must identify as African-American and/or Black, be a female, be between the ages of 25 and 34, identify as heterosexual, and have never been married. Participants must also have obtained at least a bachelor's degree and want and/or have a desire to get married to a man.

Participation Procedures and Duration

For this project, you will be asked to participate in a demographic survey to identify whether or not you meet the criteria to participate in the study. It will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Participants who meet the inclusion criteria will be contacted to arrange dates and times for an interview.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity

All data will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of the data.

Storage of Data

The data will be stored on the primary investigator's password-protected computer. Only members of the research team will have access to the data. The data will be destroyed 1 year after the study concludes.

Risks or Discomforts

The only anticipated risk from participating in this survey is that you may not feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You may choose not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and you may quit the study at any time.

Benefits

There are no foreseeable benefits to participating in this survey.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator at any time during the study.

IRB Contact Information

For one's rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070, irb@bsu.edu.

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Appendix C – Informed Consent for Interview Participants

Study Title An Exploration of the Marital Preferences of Heterosexual College-Educated Black Women: A Qualitative Examination

Study Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the marital preferences of heterosexual college-educated Black women who have never been married and desire to become married. This study also seeks to explore the factors this population believes contributes to their marital status.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must identify as African-American and/or Black, be a female, be between the ages of 25 and 34, identify as heterosexual, and have never been married. Participants must also have obtained at least a bachelor's degree and want and/or have a desire to get married to a man.

Participation Procedures and Duration

For this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview to discuss your views and experiences as a college-educated Black women who has never been married. The interview discussion will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. It will take approximately one hour to complete the interview.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity

All data will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of the data. Any direct quotes from a participant will be masked by a pseudonym, and participants will be invited to read the study before any results will be presented or published.

Storage of Data

Electronic transcripts will be stored on the principal investigator's computer and will be stored in a file secured with a password. Paper transcripts and data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's office for one year and will then be shredded. Only the principal investigator and the research team will have access to the data. All electronic and paper data will be destroyed by December of 2016.

Risks or Discomforts

The only anticipated risk from participating in this study is that you may not feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You may choose not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and you may quit the study at any time.

Benefits

One benefit you may gain from participating in this study may be sharing your personal experience to better understand the premise of the "marriage crisis" for college-educated Black women.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator at any time during the study.

IRB Contact Information

For one's rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070, irb@bsu.edu.

Study Title

An Exploration of the Marital Preferences of Heterosexual College-Educated Black Women: A Qualitative Examination

Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, "An Exploration of the Marital Preferences of Heterosexual College-Educated Black Women: A Qualitative Examination," I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher Contact Information

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Appendix D – Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _____

Contact Information: (to contact you if you are selected to participate)

Email Address _____ Phone Number _____

Please specify your gender: Female Male

Please specify your race:

Black and/or African-American (non-Hispanic)

Hispanic/Latino(a)

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian or Asian-American

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Caucasian/White (non-Hispanic)

Biracial

- Do you identify with one race more than the other, if so please specify which one?

Other (please specify) _____

Age _____

Sexual Orientation:

Heterosexual

Bisexual

Lesbian

Asexual

Pansexual

Marital Status: Never Married Married Separated Divorced Widowed

Relationship Status:

Single

Single by Choice

Single, but Casually Dating

Exclusively Dating Someone, but no committed relationship at this time

In a Relationship

Engaged

Current Educational Standing (Please select all that apply)

_____ Bachelor's Degree in progress

_____ Bachelor's Degree Obtained

_____ Enrolled in a master's program

_____ Master's Degree Obtained

_____ Enrolled in a doctoral program

_____ Doctoral Degree Obtained

_____ Enrolled in a professional degree program (i.e. JD, MD, PharmD, etc.)

_____ Professional Degree Obtained (i.e. JD, MD, PharmD, etc.)

Occupation _____

Do you have a desire to get married to a man one day? Yes No

How would you rate your overall difficulty of finding your preferred marriage partner?

Extremely difficult Very difficult Somewhat Difficult Not difficult at all

Do you think it is more difficult for Black women to find a preferred marriage partner than it is for women of other racial groups? Yes No

Thank you for your time!

Appendix E – Interview Questions

1. For this particular study, I specifically wanted to understand the experiences of single college-educated Black women who would eventually like to become married. You indicated that you desire to get married in the future and I want to start by asking you to discuss why getting married in the future is important to you and how you envision the experience of getting married.
2. What are your views on marriage?
3. How do you feel about your current marital status?
 - a. Follow up: What types of messages, if any, have you received about being single at this stage in your life?
4. What qualities would you prefer for your marriage partner to possess?
 - a. Follow up: If not already mentioned: What role does race play in your decision regarding who to marry? Educational background? Socioeconomic status?
 - b. Follow up: What makes these qualities important to you?
5. How have your own educational pursuits (or professional career, if the participant is not in school) impacted your ability to find a marriage partner?
6. What challenges, if any, have you faced in your relationships when it comes to finding your preferred marriage partner?
7. Based on your experiences, what are your views on Black men as potential marriage partners?
 - a. Follow up: If applicable, how would you describe your dating relationships with Black men and/or men of other races?
8. If you never got married, what would that mean for you?
9. On your demographic survey you rated your overall difficulty of finding your preferred marriage partner as (Extremely difficult, Very difficult, Somewhat Difficult, Not difficult at all – state option the participant endorsed). Talk to me about why finding your preferred marriage partner has been (state option the participant endorsed).
10. Also on your demographic survey, when asked “do you think it is more difficult for Black women to find a preferred marriage partner than it is for women of other racial groups?,” you answered (yes/no - state option the participant endorsed). Talk to me about why the answer to that question was yes for you.
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a college-educated African-American/Black woman who has never been married?

Appendix F – Master List of Participant Responses

1. Why marriage is important: Consisted of 10 ideas that represented why the participants viewed marriage as being important to them.

Companionship; Someone to share life with. This repeating idea was noted by 5 participants who described marriage as important due to their desire for having a partner/companion and someone to spend their life with.

Participant 4: *So, those are reasons why I think I want to get married, for companionship and the ability to partner with someone and make an impact on the lives of others.*

Participant 8: *And of course nobody wants to grow old and alone by themselves and it's just that companionship, like having someone there that you can depend on and...basically like your better half.*

Participant 10: *It would be to share all of the success from my personal hard work with another person and to work as a team with someone.*

Societal pressure and expectations. For this repeating idea, 5 participants indicated that societal pressure and expectations influenced why they believed marriage to be important.

Participant 9: *You know I don't know why it's important...I guess it's like...that's what I was told that you should do.*

Lifetime achievement and goals. This repeating idea was noted by 3 participants who identified marriage as important based on life goals.

Participant 2: *I would say getting married in the future is important to me in terms of lifetime achievement, lifetime goals of having a partner to share life with.*

Family and Christian values. Three participants stated that their family and Christian values impacted their views on marital importance.

Participant 5: *It's important to me just for family values and I do identify as a Christian and I would say a practicing and conservative Christian, so very traditional. I was just always raised that you get married. That's just something that you do. I don't really desire to have a baby out of wedlock, or...those types of things so yeah like I said I would consider myself to be very traditional.*

Various models of marriage. Having been exposed to marriage and having those models

were expressed by 3 participants.

Participant 1: *Because I was raised in an environment where there was marriage, my parents are still married so that just seems like the more natural thing to do in terms of what will make me feel content and comfortable in my adult life.*

Participant 10: *Looking at my parents, they've been married for 31 years and just seeing how much fun it would be to share all of the success from my personal hard work with another person and to work as a team with someone. So, I guess I wanna follow in my mom's footsteps of you know being established and independent but not looking back when I'm however old and saying 'I don't have anybody to share this with.*

Desire to have a family and children. This repeating idea was noted by 2 participants who described marriage as important for fulfilling their desires to have a family and children.

Participant 3: *I guess because mostly I'm interested in having children like a family and I would like to be married with kids. I never desired to have a child without being married.*

To share the financial burden. Two participants indicated that marriage was also important for financial reasons.

Participant 2: *I think it's very important in terms of I mean obviously like the benefits logistically of bills and someone else to carry part of the financial burden of just living.*

For happiness and love. This repeating idea was noted by 2 participants.

Participant 1: *I have visions about being happy and sharing love with someone and marriage is kind of the official stamp on that love and that legal stamp on that love for those things.*

To raise children in a two parent household. One participant described how getting married to her fiancé was important for raising the children they have together.

Participant 8: *I was raised in a two-parent household. I currently have two children of my own so I want them raised in a two-parent household.*

Marriage is the only long-term relationship I am willing to have with a man. For one participant, getting married was the only long-term commitment she was willing to have with a man.

Participant 11: *I'm not really willing to have any other kind of long term relationship with a man so...that would be it.*

2. Views on marriage. Consisted of 13 ideas representing the participants various views on marriage.

Marriage is a partnership. This repeating idea was noted by 5 participants.

Participant 7: *I guess for me it's a partnership... based on a really strong friendship.*

Marriage takes hard work. Four participants stated that marriage is not easy and takes a lot of time and effort.

Participant 7: *It requires sacrifice, love, compromise.*

Participant 10: *I think that it's something that should almost be practiced in a sense, so I think when you're in a committed relationship and you feel like that person is potentially someone that you could end up marrying, spending the rest of your life with, then you have to start practicing things like....just because this person gets on my nerves today doesn't mean we'd break up today type stuff... or picking and choosing your battles....I don't have to argue and fuss about every single little thing because it's gonna make things a lot more difficult moving forward.*

Marriage is a lifelong commitment. Three participants endorsed this idea.

Participant 4: *The way I view marriage is that it's a lifelong companion partner, someone that I could share experiences with and the idea of having that person for just a long time for forever like family to me that feels really special for me.*

Marriage is sacred. This repeating idea was noted by 2 participants.

Participant 10: *I think that it's one that's not taken as seriously in today's society as it has been in the past. I'm hoping that marriage is til death do us part whenever my time does come...I think that it's really sacred and it's something that should be taken seriously.*

The media negatively influences perceptions of marriage. Two participants indicated that they believed the media negatively impacted the way society views marriage.

Participant 2: *I think that there are a lot of bad images and bad perceptions about marriage in the media.*

Things should be kept between the partners in the marriage. The view that issues and concerns within the marriage should be kept between the 2 partners were expressed by 2 participants.

Participant 6: *It should be based on honesty and accountability between the two and whatever happens in the household should be kept between the two and not involve too many outsiders.*

The relationship shouldn't dramatically change just because you are married. This repeating idea was noted by 2 participants.

Participant 3: *I think that marriage should be similar to your relationship prior, like I don't think it should change just because you get married.*

Marriage shouldn't be defined by a legal document. Two participants indicated that there should not be as much legal involvement with marriage as there is.

Participant 1: *I think marriage should be what people want it to be...I don't think that there should be a lot of government mandate on what a marriage should be and what should constitute a marriage.*

Powerful and positive if done correctly. This repeating idea was noted by 2 participants who emphasized how great marriage could be when it is done correctly.

Participant 2: *I think that marriage is a great and powerful thing if you do it right.*

You shouldn't get married or stay married if you aren't happy. Two participants described how being happy and staying happy in a marriage was key.

Participant 2: *People change I think so I am someone who is open to both marriage and divorce if necessary...I believe in not being in situations where you're going to be consistently unhappy or where someone is taking away from their happiness...I think you might as well be single.*

You should get married first and then have children. Getting married and having children after marriage was important for 2 participants.

Participant 9: *I was raised to where you're married first and then have children, so I guess not saying old school, but I do believe in that although I went a different route.*

Marriage is traditionally between a man and a woman. One participant described this idea as important.

Participant 6: *Marriage, traditionally male and woman, but now I know laws are changing and you know now I believe love is love, but I'm still more, you know, aiming*

towards the male and female which I still think is the most common way and most acceptable way.

Marriage is an efficient use of resources. For one participant, marriage was important in terms of maximizing our resources.

Participant 11: *It's just efficient...one house instead of two one whatever instead of two, it's like an efficient use of resources.*

4. Feelings about my current marital status. Consisted of 8 ideas that characterized how the participants felt about not being married.

Currently content. This repeating idea was noted by 9 participants who indicated that although they desired to be married in the future, they were content with not being married at this time.

Participant 2: *I'm always fine being single and I don't feel like a part of me is missing or anything like that.*

Participant 7: *So I thought that if I had kept going in that trajectory [of not being married] I'd be sad, or you know kind of like not feel like I was as fulfilled....cause I'm almost 30, I turn 30 next month, and I'm not married, and I don't have kids and all those things, but I'm actually quite happy just because I've been in relationships and those relationships are over and I'm happy with the fact that they're over because they weren't for me, you know? And so, I'm just kind of really content with the way my life is.*

Not in a rush to get married. For this repeating idea, 5 participants indicated that they felt as though they were not in a rush to get married for various reasons.

Participant 1: *I feel like I'm still in a place in my life where I'm exploring who I am and what I want and so I think for me it's more important to figure out the answers to those questions before I settle down.*

Participant 2: *Good [feeling about not being married] [laughs], so I am with a partner and we probably will get married at some point but for me that's kind of like, I'm not in a rush to do that.*

Dislike due to societal pressure. This repeating idea was noted by 4 participants who described that they did not like not being married because of the societal pressures they face.

Participant 4: *I feel negatively impacted by some of the reminders that I get from the environment around me in the same way that we are in a heterosexual, patriarchal, predominately White environment we are also in a....our society favors those who are married, you get tax breaks, so I'm impacted from an emotional level but then also you know from a financial level. There's just all sorts of ways in which being a single person can be viewed negatively.*

Did not think I would still be single. Four participants stated that they believed they would have been married by now or moving in the direction of marriage.

Participant 10: *It's funny because I think when I was younger I envisioned myself being married right now... ..if you asked me when I was in high school, 10 years ago where I'd be at the age of 26 I would've never told you that I'd be working on a PhD...so I'm not where I envisioned myself being, but I have absolutely no complaints of where I...I just didn't see this coming for myself.*

Participant 11: *I didn't expect to be single at 29 with like no prospects.*

Marriage is more on my radar now. This repeating idea was mentioned by 3 participants as they described how the idea of marriage was more prevalent for them now.

Participant 4: *The short answer is that I don't like it [being single]. How do I feel about it? I wish that I had a committed partner. I could even still be single right now but single, committed moving in that direction. And so for the past, well since I finished my doctorate, my views shifted a little bit. When I was in graduate school my focus was more on professional development and so I was less, I was happier with my single status. I think since I've been out now for about 2.5 years my focus has shifted and now it impacts me to a greater extent that I am single and not in a committed relationship.*

Participant 5: *Everyone in my department, there's 5 of us, and besides my director, they're all married, and we're all 25. And so I was like wow, I mean they're all from down south too. And so it's just...I guess this is the first year when I actually thought, I'm getting kind of old maybe I should, you know, start (laughter).*

It gets lonely being single. Three participants revealed feelings of loneliness about not being married or having a committed partner.

Participant 4: *At times it can be lonely...particularly during the holidays...holiday season can be...can come with a mixture of emotions for people. It's a great time to spend with family but for single people it can highlight the fact that you don't have a significant other. Holidays outside of maybe Christmas or Thanksgiving you know if you think about Valentine's Day or things of that nature.*

It allows me more freedom to do things that I want. One participant shared how not

being married allowed her to do things that she might not be able to do as much if she were married.

Participant 4: *I do like the fact that I can get up and travel whenever I want to and financially I don't have as many obligations.*

Disappointed. One participant stated that she felt disappointed about not being married or having a committed partner.

Participant 11: *Somewhat disappointed, only because I don't see a clear remedy for the solution.*

5. Received messages regarding one's marital status. Consisted of 7 ideas that emphasized various messages participants reported receiving from others about their current marital status.

Pressure from society, friends, and family. This repeating idea was noted by 9 participants who indicated that they receive general messages of pressure regarding marriage from those around them.

Participant 1: *There's definitely pressure from society of course, like I'm 31, so everyone's always asking me.*

"When are you getting married?"; "It's time"; "You should be married". Three participants noted that they are constantly asked when are they getting married and are told that it's time and/or that they should be married.

Participant 4: *So from family, I've received that it's time, when are you getting married?, when are you having kids?, so I've received the message that a woman my age, I'm 31, so a woman my age should be married.*

"Why aren't you married?". This repeating idea was noted by 3 participants who stated that they are constantly questioned about why they are not married?

Participant 6: *Just the general questions of why?, why?, you know you're beautiful, you're smart, got a good head on your shoulders, you don't have any kids, wow why not?*

"Something is wrong with me". Three participants shared that they received the

message that because they were not married something was wrong with them.

Participant 7: *I will say that considering the way I was socialized I notice that whenever I'm home on holidays with my family and with the larger family they're expecting, well why isn't?, you know, is she broken?, like why isn't she married?*

No messages received. This repeating idea was mentioned by 2 participants who indicated that they receive no messages about their marital status.

I'm too picky; I need to lower my standards. One participant revealed that she has received the message that her standards are too high.

Participant 4: *I've received the message that I need to lower my standards a little bit or that perhaps I'm being too picky...having a higher degree [sigh] sometimes people assume that you might place certain expectations on your partner and I don't think that my partner necessarily has to have the same level of education that I do. And in terms of compatibility it's likely that we will be most compatible if we are matched in that way. So I received the message that maybe I'm too picky.*

No good men exist. One participant stated that from her college-educated Black female peers she is often told that no good men exist.

Participant 1: *I have other single friends that are also educated Black women who are around my age and they're very bitter toward men, so when I have conversations with them I get a lot of messages about how there really are no good guys and if you do want to find a guy you have to lower your standards and just a lot of male bashing I guess.*

6. Qualities in a marriage partner. Encompassed the various qualities participants indicated that they desired in a marriage partner. Due to the numerous responses, each idea is listed in the table below with the number of participants who mentioned each quality in parentheses. Most qualities were simply listed by participants during the interview; therefore, quotes were not provided. Ideas with accompanying quotes are also listed.

Qualities in a Marriage Partner

Quality	Supporting Quote (when available)
Faith; Christian (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 5: <i>Well he has to be a Christian.... you know the bible says don't be unequally yoked. And so I have a Christian worldview and so if you're not Christian that could present a lot of conflicts and I've tried that before in the past and it just literally presents a lot of conflicts, so that's not something I can negotiate on.</i> Participant 10: <i>Faith and God. I do identify as a Christian, that's something that's really important to me and something that I don't think I could really negotiate.</i>
Honesty; Integrity (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 2: <i>I think having integrity is very important to me.</i> Participant 8: <i>Honesty. I need someone that I, that's honest with me even when I don't wanna hear it.</i>
Good communication; conflict resolution skills (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 5: <i>When a situation arises or some type of conflict arises instead of just giving up, you know seeing that you should work through it and try to come to some solution and things like that.</i> Participant 7: <i>Someone's who's going to compromise and address things as they come along.</i>
Driven; Ambitious; Hardworking (5)	
Values family and relationships (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 1: <i>I would prefer someone with a similar family background to me, someone who thinks family is really important and someone who thinks getting along with their family is important.</i> Participant 4: <i>Someone who wants a family, and who values their relationships with their family and friends.</i>
Intelligence (4)	
Faithful; Loyal (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 11: <i>Fidelity is probably like my number one trait.</i>
Affectionate; Loving; Kind (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 10: <i>Affection, you know I come from an affectionate family and that's every day I love you, hugs, and all that type of stuff and so that's big to me and I think I didn't know that until I dated someone who like couldn't do that, like, just wasn't affectionate at all.</i>
Committed to learning me (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 10: <i>I think it's really good to have someone that is really dedicated to learning me.</i>
Able to participate in intellectual conversations (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 2: <i>Someone who can think creatively about the issues especially things going on in our nation right now.</i>
Financially responsible/stable (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 4: <i>Someone who has an awareness of the legacy with that being like they don't have to be great with money but they have to have an awareness around how we need to be mindful of our finances.</i>

Caring; Nurturing (4)	
Supportive; Understanding (4)	
Open-minded (3)	
Desire to grow (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 2: <i>I want somebody who's also working on building themselves up and then once we're a couple then building the couple up together.</i>
Has a career (3)	
Goal-oriented (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 1: <i>They need to have goals other than what they're going to eat for dinner, you know they need to have a broad perspective on what they want out of life.</i>
Trustworthy (2)	
Possesses morals/beliefs (2)	
Thoughtful (2)	
Sense of humor (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 5: <i>I like people that are funny.</i>
Relatable (2)	
Provider (2)	
Able to process and communicate their emotions (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 4: <i>I need a partner who when I notice those things is going to be able to process their emotions with me.</i> Participant 5: <i>You know doesn't really react off of emotion that's a big thing.</i>
Independent (2)	
Strong-minded (2)	
Someone who challenges me (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 7: <i>Someone who's a lifelong learner, they can't be somebody who doesn't challenge me.</i>
Has similar interests (2)	
Someone who can tolerate me (2)	
Someone who is direct (2)	
Physically attractive (2)	
Sense of fashion (2)	
Responsible (1)	

Sensitive to my emotional sensitivity (1)	
Contributes to household duties; avoids stereotypical gender roles (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 7: <i>I've been in some relationships where there were very, you know, basic daily things like cooking, and taking care of things and so someone who's sensitive to that and you know doesn't expect certain rules to fall under certain things.</i>
Willing to compromise (1)	
Culturally sensitive (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 7: <i>I describe myself as an American but I'm also East African, and so someone who's open to understanding me and my culture comes very important to me.</i>
Doesn't complain (1)	
Giving (1)	
Patient (1)	
Confident (1)	
Someone who knows who they are (1)	
Selflessness (1)	
Someone who trusts me (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 2: <i>I work a lot of nights and weekends and so I need somebody when I do say I have to work this weekend they're not thinking "oh you're cheating" like they trust me to know I'm in my office.</i>
Has a child (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant 9: <i>I would look for them to already have a child so I don't have to feel obligated to have any more kids.</i>
Not domineering (1)	

6. Racial preferences in a marriage partner. Consisted of 4 ideas representing what role race played in each participant's marital preferences.

No racial preference. This repeating idea was noted by 4 participants who stated that race did not matter when it came to their marriage partner.

Participant 8: *It [race] doesn't play any role because actually my fiancé is White and my kids, both of my kids are mixed...he's actually the first Caucasian guy I've dated...and he'll be my last guy (laughter)...so it doesn't really play...you can't help who you fall in love with.*

Participant 9: *I don't really have a preference. I've dated, well all the people I've dated are Black and White, so I haven't dated other than that, so I don't necessarily say I have a preference but I haven't been approached by, I guess any other race.*

Prefer a Black man and I'm unsure about dating/marrying outside of my race. Three participants noted that they preferred to marry a Black man and were unsure about their willingness to date or marry outside of their race.

Participant 4: *I don't even think I envision or even think about race not that it doesn't play a role, but in my mind I'm marrying a Black man.*

Participant 5: *Very big [the role that race plays] (laughter). I mean I don't think I'm even like attracted to anyone besides Black men.*

Prefer a Black man, but I'm open to other races. This repeating idea was noted by 3 participants who shared that they had a preference for Black men, but would be open to considering a partner of a different race.

Participant 2: *I think I prefer Black men but I've also never seriously dated a person outside of my race, only because and it's not because I'm not open to it, but I've never had anybody seriously be interested in me who was from another race.*

Prefer a Black American. One participant shared that she preferred a Black man who identified as American.

Participant 11: *If there are Black males, they're not American, and that's also like an important thing to me.... culture is a big thing. Black Americans are like popular opinion. Now we do have a very distinct culture so if I was willing to date like a foreign Black person, I'd be married already but you know, I'm not.*

7. Reasons for racial preferences. Consisted of 5 ideas expressing why the participant's racial preferences were important to them.

I've never been approached by someone from another race. This repeating idea was noted by 7 participants who indicated that the opportunities for relationships with men of other races were not there, as men of other races have never approached them or men of other races were not seriously interested in dating them.

Participant 2: *I've been in a lot of predominantly white places, I've never had a white man come up and say something to me seriously like "oh can I take you on a date."*

Participant 10: *I've never been approached by someone outside of my race either so I don't know if that would be...I don't know how I'd handle it if it happened, so right now it doesn't seem like that big of a deal but I don't know if I was actually in the moment, faced with having to make that type of decision if I would actually really think about it more.*

To avoid cultural differences and challenges. Six participants stated that the cultural challenges influenced their racial preferences.

Participant 2: *I also would say I would encounter less friction dating a Black man than I would a White man in terms of, when I say friction I mean in terms of answering questions or people looking just because our society's not, everyone's not fully open to it. If I walk around with a Black man there's no questions asked, my family doesn't say anything. But if I walk around with a White man then there's questions asked or people might look some kind of way. And I think my family would be very accepting but there's definitely members of my family who would not be. So even being with a Black man right now it would be the path of least resistance.*

Participant 5: *I have a friend...she likes White guys and I'm like "so what happens when you tie your hair up at night?" She's like "well I don't...I just sleep like real cute," and I'm like "see no that can't happen" (laughter)....If you can't deal with me putting my twists out and my perm rods in my hair and this is not an expectation or something you ever dealt with, I feel like that would be a big hurdle to get over.*

Participant 11: *If there's gonna be any glue in the marriage like culture plays like a big role. You have to understand what, you know, like the holidays I need to know like what people are talking about, what you know we're expected to talk about, you know what's rude to say in your culture, what's rude to do as opposed to American cultures, like should we expect like for your parents to move in, when they hit this age?*

Black men understand what it means to be Black. This repeating idea was noted by 3 participants who stated that their preference for Black men was due to the fact that they believed Black men better understood their experience as a Black person.

Participant 3: *They [Black men] understand what it means to be Black, you know. I have experienced discrimination or felt like I have and I think another person, a Black man, understands that more or would understand that more because they've been there themselves and I think other races you know, they understand it less.*

Participant 4: *I think it might be harder for me to trust at a deep level, a partner who had not had....does not have some connection or understanding of my experience as a Black woman.*

I'm most compatible with Black men. For this repeating idea, 3 participants indicated that their preference for Black men was based on compatibility.

Participant 4: *I feel most compatible and complimentary with a Black man.*

I had a very diverse upbringing. Two participants expressed that their backgrounds and diverse experiences influenced why race did not matter in regards to their marital preference.

Participant 1: *I think that's probably part of my upbringing....again just living in liberal places and having several relationships in my family be interracial and having dated and had friends of a variety of cultural backgrounds. I mean most of the men I end up meeting are Black but, that's not necessarily a preference it's just kind of like what's been my path.*

8. Educational preferences in a marriage partner. Consisted of 6 ideas indicating the level of education participants preferred for their marriage partner to possess.

A high school diploma is a necessity. This repeating idea was noted by 4 participants who expressed that having at least a high school diploma was essential.

Participant 7: *At the very least a high school diploma.*

At least a bachelor's degree. Four participants stated that a bachelor's degree was preferred.

Participant 1: *Someone who has, who probably has gone to college, I think, as the years have gone by I found that I have much more in common with people that have at least that level of education then people who never have gone to school.*

Participant 5: *I think that a lot of men, especially Black men can get intimidated if you're very educated and especially since I went ahead with a terminal degree, so, I mean at least a college degree.*

No educational preference as long as he is a hard worker and desires to learn and grow. This repeating idea was noted by 3 participants who expressed that educational attainment did not matter as long as their marriage partners were willing to put in hard work, and to learn

and grow with new opportunities.

Participant 7: *I said something that's very important to me is for the person to be a learner and to just love learning. And so, it doesn't necessarily have to be in the formal sense, you know higher ed, it doesn't have to be a post doc like me... but some level of education, or some desire to learn and improve oneself.*

Have some college experience. For this repeating idea, 2 participants indicated that having some college experience was important.

Participant 10: *I think that nothing can replace a college experience. I think there are some common things that we can share so it is important that they've had some college experience, you know just little things like understanding all nighters or you know understanding roommate dynamics or different things that come with the traditional college experience. I think it just makes it a little bit easier to connect.*

The more education the better, but it's not a deal breaker. Two participants noted that although they preferred a marriage partner with high educational attainment, it was not a deal breaker.

Participant 2: *I would prefer the more education the better.*

Prefer a post baccalaureate degree. One participant expressed that she preferred for her marriage partner to have obtained education beyond the bachelor's degree.

Participant 3: *Yea I was looking for somebody who did something beyond a bachelor's degree...I always knew that I wanted to go back to grad school and I wanted to be with someone who did some sort of professional, something beyond the bachelor's like, could be law, could be business, could be medical, something.*

9. Reasons for educational preferences. Consisted of 10 ideas stating some of the reasoning behind the participant's educational preferences.

Limited number of preferred/available men with similar education. This repeating idea was mentioned by 3 participants who stated that their educational preferences for a marriage partner were based on the limited number of preferred and available men with similar educational attainment as them.

Participant 1: *I feel like there aren't a lot of men in my age range with like a similar background and similar goals in life that are still single.*

Participant 2: *I also haven't had the experience of having a big pool of men who are who have master's degrees or who have you know attained education at the level or higher..... If I grew up in a world where there were many Black guys with master's walking around then that would be a different story but [laughs].*

Belief that if you work hard you can be successful regardless of education. Three participants indicated that the level of educational attainment in a marriage partner did not matter based on their view that one could still be successful without a college education.

Participant 10: *I've come across some people who are way smarter than I am without degrees. I realized that my decision to pursue this degree is because of my career aspirations, in my opinion it's necessary, it will be necessary at a certain point. Every career doesn't require all that and I think that you can be successful without all of that.*

College experience is key for personal development and growth. This repeating idea was noted by 2 participants who expressed the importance of a college experience for one's personal growth, which is why it influenced their educational preferences in a partner.

Participant 4: *I do know that there are exceptions and outliers and I believe that there could be someone or there exists a person who has not gone to college but is a self made learner.....the beauty in going to college or having a bachelors or maybe having that experience is that there is some personal development that happens during that, some exploration, some key identity stuff that happens that if I married a partner who hadn't have a bachelors or didn't have those experiences would have had to have gotten that in some other way. So as long as they have found out who they are, can speak thoughtfully about world events and have inquisitive critical thinking like a lot of that happens in college.*

Desire to share similar experiences and connect. For this repeating idea, 2 participants indicated that their preference for a marriage partner with at least a college degree was based on the need for connecting and having similar experiences.

Participant 1: *I think that when you have a similar educational background or when those values are shared, I think that it's a lot easier to kind of relate on that level than someone who is just kind of on a different track.*

A desire to learn, ambition, and drive are more important. Two participants expressed

that a desire for their marriage partner to learn and have ambition mattered more than his education level.

Participant 2: *I feel it's more important to me that the other qualities are in line so even if you don't have a college degree but you are ambitious or you do have your own business or you are thinking of different ways that you can make money or you know achieve the things that you want to achieve in life.*

Not everyone has the opportunity to attend college. This repeating idea was stated by 2 participants who shared that level of education did not matter because they understood that everyone did not have the opportunity to attend college.

Participant 8: *So in my case it really wasn't an option, but for instance for my fiancé, he didn't finish college because he didn't have that help and the finances to finish, but in the same sense he makes more money than I do.*

You can always go back to school. One participant mentioned that because one can always go back to school, she did not place a high importance on her marriage partner's education.

Participant 2: *I feel like you can go back to school you can get those things.*

My family values education. This repeating idea was shared by one participant whose preference for advanced education in a marriage partner was based on the value her family placed on education.

Participant 3: *My parents both have PhDs.....it would be very awkward for me to bring somebody home who definitely didn't have a bachelor's degree that would be out of the question. Just a bachelor's degree would still be a little bit like so what's your plan?, what are you planning to do with your life? [laughs].*

More education provides financial stability. For this repeating idea, one participant indicated that she preferred higher levels of education in a marriage partner due to the financial stability education can provide.

Participant 6: *It [educational preference] would be masters because that would allow more security for the family.*

Education without other important qualities is meaningless. One participant noted that educational level did not matter in a marriage partner because she believed that educational attainment did not mean much if her partner did not possess the other qualities that she deemed important.

Participant 2: *Education doesn't equal great man. But there are definitely men who are great who don't have the levels of education and same thing, men with it, but I haven't met those men yet, so [laughs] that's why I don't put all the value into that, so if you have good character, you have ambition, you have all the other qualities that I want, then I'm not going to say okay I'm not going to date you because you don't have a college degree.*

10. Socioeconomic preferences in a marriage partner. Consisted of 4 ideas representing the socioeconomic preferences participants desired in a marriage partner.

Not important as long as he can contribute to the household. This repeating idea was mentioned by 6 participants who shared that their marriage partner's socioeconomic level did not matter as long as he could financially contribute to the household.

Participant 2: *I would want somebody who can bring things to the table, who can afford to match the bills, to split the bills with me and those sorts of things.....I've never dated anyone who's made more than me, like ever in life, so I don't feel like you have to make what I make. I just feel like even if you can't split the bills evenly, that you're willing to contribute to the bills.*

Participant 5: *I would like to...at least a man to be stable....and to be able to contribute. I don't have a problem with making more money than him...I guess it's not that important as long as you have a job and you're stable and you can contribute.*

Prefer someone with equal or higher SES. Two participants indicated that they preferred for their marriage partner to possess a socioeconomic status that was equivalent to there's or higher.

Participant 9: *I at least want them to be where I am or above.*

Prefers middle to upper-class. This repeating idea was noted by 2 participants who revealed that they preferred for their marriage partner to have a middle class or upper-class

socioeconomic standing.

Participant 3: *You know I always kind of gravitated towards I guess, middle to upper class and that's naturally because of their educational background usually, the more education you have, the more money you make.*

Must have middle-class aspirations. One participant expressed that the socioeconomic status of her marriage partner did not matter as long as he had middle-class aspirations.

Participant 11: *I don't care if they have working class origins or whatever. All I would expect are middle class aspirations.*

11. Educational/professional challenges and finding a marriage partner. Consisted of 6 ideas outlining the various challenges participants mentioned having with finding a marriage partner due to their educational pursuits and professional endeavors.

Issues with work/relationship balance; Focus on relationships neglected. This repeating idea was mentioned by 7 participants who stated that their pursuit of education resulted in problems with work/relationship balance and focus on their education and careers led to relationships being neglected or put on the backburner.

Participant 4: *I think it's delayed me dating and focusing on that aspect of my life.*

Participant 7: *I know that personal relationships have taken kind of a back seat because of my educational pursuits... There was always stress from my partner's side where they felt as though I wasn't prioritizing the relationship.*

Participant 10: *I never really even considered my academic pursuits as affecting my relationship status. I didn't understand why those two things couldn't always coexist and just be what it is. I didn't quite recognize or acknowledge that like yes once you put more effort into one thing, like there's only so many hours in the day right?, so if I'm putting more effort into one thing it's probably going to take away from the time I could put into something else and unfortunately that came at the expense of some relationships.*

It limited options for meeting partners based on my location. Five participants indicated that their educational pursuits placed them in geographic regions that made it difficult to meet their preferred partners based on where they were located.

Participant 2: *I would say just maybe geographically as well as I think in Minnesota, it was a lot tougher to find men who were interested than it is in the south.*

Moving around a lot/feeling unsettled. This repeating idea was noted by 3 participants who expressed that their focus on education resulted in moving around and feeling unsettled, which made it difficult to find a partner.

Participant 1: *I think another thing that's impacted is just moving around so much. So when you're in academia usually each step of your career like college, you usually don't go to the same school for graduate school and you usually don't stay at the same place for your post-doc and you usually don't stay at the same place if you get a position. So I think moving around a lot has also been a barrier because just me feeling unsettled is part of the reason why I haven't been that motivated to make dating or making finding a partner a priority.*

Participant 4: *Having been a graduate student I've moved around a lot...I didn't feel settled...then having to have long distance relationships.*

Resulted in long-distance relationships. For this repeating idea, 3 participants indicated that their educational pursuits resulted in having to manage long-distance relationships.

Participant 10: *I think with this degree and being in a long distance relationship it's really opened my eyes to how much of a sacrifice pursuing your education or continuing your education can be... I made a conscious decision that I wanted to knock this out and not run into that barrier in the future...but at the same time, that means I have to put some stuff on hold kind of, so yeah I am in a relationship now but the distance is hard you know, it makes it more difficult to resolve arguments...Dismissing each other that type of stuff, to feel like we're moving forward as steadily as we were when we were closer together...I think my focus on my degree and the distance between us has caused things to slow down a little.*

Being in a female dominated field makes it difficult to meet men. Three participants expressed that being in a female dominated field made finding a marriage partner difficult due to the inability to meet men at work or through other professional activities.

Participant 9: *I don't think it has, except for the fact that I don't work with men. I mean, so I guess that would be an impact, I don't work with them, I only work with females.*

Belief/fear that more education reduces my chances of becoming married. One participant shared that her educational pursuits and desire for more education created fear that

she may never get married based on the number of Black single and educated women she observed in her professional circle.

Participant 5: *I did consider it [that I would never get married] cause that's definitely I guess a fear because I'm in my graduate chapter here.....I did that because they had a good group of women that were my age, but it was also like a group of women that had PhDs and like terminal degrees....and as I got to know them more, I realized that all of these women with PhDs they're all single and like in their late 30s and like they have great careers and things like that....and I'm like well, is this you know a mentality? like oh I'm not about to compromise my professional goals or educational goals? is that where that leaves me? Cause I mean they still desire to be in relationships.*

12. Other challenges with finding a marriage partner. Consisted of 13 ideas representing the challenges participants faced when finding a marriage partner that were separate from their educational and professional challenges.

Limited number of preferred/available men who are on the same level as me. This repeating idea was mentioned by 7 participants who expressed that finding a man with similar education was a challenge when it came to finding a marriage partner.

Participant 2: *I have never found anybody who is currently in that situation that is on the same level as me [referring to educational attainment].*

Participant 10: *I hate to say this but as a Black woman I'm not quite sure what the dating pool is looking like with Black males who have the same amount of degrees as I do or have reached this level academically.*

Men not being mature enough or ready for commitment. Seven participants indicated that finding men that were mature and ready for commitment was challenging.

Participant 1: *A lot of men that I meet my age are either already spoken for or they're just not interested in settling down.*

Participant 4: *I have found in the last three relationships that I'm ready, I'm ready, I'm ready to be serious and they're like "mmm not yet. You're great, you're awesome, but I'm not ready."*

Participant 10: *I think there's a fear of commitment that a lot of the people that I've dated or even conversed with as friends, the young men, and I think to an extent they feel like a little clock is ticking like somewhere they think that they should be settling down but the*

idea of it is like scaring them and so it's like yeah we can be cool, or you know I can be your boyfriend but the idea of taking it to an engagement or marriage I think them having those conversations scares them.

Maturing; Knowing myself; Working on me first. This repeating idea was noted by 5 participants who expressed that finding a marriage partner has been challenging due to their own maturity levels and needing time for personal growth within themselves.

Participant 4: *I think I placed unrealistic expectations on my past partners to fulfill my emotional needs in ways that wasn't their job. So maybe some codependency, and so it's been really hard in the past because I've had to mature and grow into a space where I could get my own emotional needs met or meet them for myself or realize that my partner can't fill every void for me.....so I had to do some growth, I had to grow. I take ownership for some of it being very difficult because of my own need to mature and work through my own emotional challenges.*

Men not being supportive or understanding of my educational/career obligations. For this repeating idea, 4 participants indicated that having partners who were not understanding of their educational and professional commitments as a challenge towards finding the person they want to marry.

Participant 6: *They know it's important [education]. They're supportive to a point and then they realize how things have to change for me to get to that point and then that's when more things come up.....especially as I was moving closer to being finished, it became more tension. I broke up with my...well he broke up with me I guess like a week before my prelim.*

Desirable men are already taken. Three participants expressed a challenge with meeting desirable men who were taken.

Participant 6: *So I might go to like a minority post doc social and you see all these other men, Black men who have PhDs...but everybody has a ring.*

Black men being intimidated by me and my success. For this repeating idea, 3 participants mentioned that meeting men, specifically Black men, who were intimidated by their educational and professional accomplishments as challenging.

Participant 4: *When you add on Black women are becoming educated at higher rates than, at least Black men, and then maybe some of the challenges associated with some of*

the compatibility stuff that I talked about, you know where you asked me if I'm okay with dating someone who doesn't have or who just has a bachelors, but then the counter question that's really important is, is a man going to be okay dating someone who has a PhD? And so sometimes I think they're not ok with that so then that lowers the pool.

Participant 6: *As you finish your PhD and get closer and closer that intimidation starts, not on your end but for them, and then they become more insecure, and that's what I've noticed throughout dating specifically through my PhD.....So, they're kind of more stagnant and as you move forward and they can see, you know, you being successful whatever they envision....They feel like they'll be left behind or they're not kind of worthy enough in a sense to be with you.*

Difficulty meeting people; Not knowing where to meet people. This repeating idea was shared by 3 participants who described a challenge related to not knowing where to meet prospective marriage partners.

Participant 5: *I don't know where you meet people....I guess a lot of people meet people at work or work events and stuff like that but then I'm in a very female dominated field and then also I'm attracted to African American guys and there's not a lot of African American people in our field, and my church is predominantly White.*

Compatibility. Three participants indicated that overall compatibility has been a challenge.

Participant 11: *I understand that I may have like an odd personality, which may make it hard to match.*

Lack of motivation to go out and meet people. Two participants stated difficulties with feeling motivated to go out and meet people in social settings in order to eventually find someone to marry in the future.

Participant 1: *When I first moved here I was not that motivated to meet someone you know, I was like settling in, making friends, so, I just wasn't motivated. So that was a challenge because if you're not motivated then you're not going to do it.*

Unfaithfulness; Finding someone I can trust. This repeating idea was shared by 2 participants who expressed challenges with unfaithfulness and trust in relationships and the impact it had on the progress of future relationships.

Participant 4: *I have experienced the challenge of finding someone that I can trust.*

Not being willing to date a man with children, which many men have. One participant revealed the challenge of meeting men who do not have children, considering her preference for a man who does not have a child.

Participant 11: *I mean I'm never going to be willing to date a man with children and by 29 a lot of people already do have children unfortunately because it's become acceptable.*

My eagerness to be in a relationship pushed people away. One participant mentioned a challenge relating to being too eager and excited at the beginning of relationships, which at times pushed that partner away and the relationship eventually ended.

Participant 4: *The person that's getting the MBA is ready but I think I got so excited or I get so excited about the potential that then I get anxious and I kind of like self-sabotage something.*

Finding someone who is willing to date/marry a woman with children. One participant shared the challenge of finding a partner who will accept her and her children.

Participant 9: *The only challenge that I face is the fact that I do have two kids from a previous relationship and...you know I'm really skeptical about who I talk to or, I guess get in a relationship with because of my children and some people might not like to date people with children.*

13. Black men as marriage partners. Consisted of 7 ideas that encompassed the various views Black men had regarding Black men and their potential as marriage partners. The majority of the participants shared positive attitudes, but also included views specific to Black men that were deemed as negative or areas of concern.

Positive attitudes toward marrying Black men and their potential. This repeating idea was noted by 10 participants who expressed having positive attitudes regarding Black men as marriage partners.

Participant 4: *I have found good Black men, but I can disconnect from my ego enough to say that I have dated really good Black men who will make good partners they just weren't meant, well we weren't meant to be together.*

Participant 5: *I love Black men...I guess its another part of my development, I mean my racial identity development, and things like that along the spectrum. But this is, you know, I really like love being Black right now, and so (laughter) umm, I...I think Black men are great. I think they make great partners.*

Participant 8: *I think they're fine. I would, if I never met my fiancé now, probably would have ended up with an African American guy.*

They tend to not be ready to commit. Seven participants shared that they experienced Black men as being less willing to be in a committed relationship.

Participant 10: *It's hard for us [Black women] to find Black men that are ok with committing and settling down with just one person for the rest of their life....I'm sure there's still issues of infidelity in other races and ethnicities and that type of stuff, or you know issues of commitment and stuff like that but it just seems like, you know, I've heard, you know Black woman after Black woman talk about Black man after Black man and a lot of the themes that arise is that the commitment isn't there.*

Have difficulty communicating and expressing emotion. This repeating idea was noted by 2 participants who stated that they believed Black men had problems with communicating and expressing their emotions.

Participant 6: *I think the ones I've entertained are the ones who have problems growing up and personal things, and Black men in particular don't really like to talk about what's going on for the most part so they have these feelings they harbor in.*

Some experience pressure in relationships. One participant indicated that she believed Black men dealt with a lot of pressure in relationships, which impacted how they view marriage.

Participant 7: *They feel a lot of pressure because one, they're meeting a lot of women who are single and who are Black and who want to be with Black men. So I think there's this kind of...pressure on them. Some of them deal with it responsibly (laughter), some of them do not.*

They possess unrealistic expectations of what a marriage partner should entail. This repeating idea was mentioned by 1 participant who stated that Black men had unrealistic expectations and standards for what a marriage partner should be.

Participant 1: *Being a Black man is such a rarity in terms of being more highly educated, being upwardly mobile. I think number one, they're not that available, so when they are available, I think a lot of times they feel as though they want to seek out an unobtainable ideal....their heads are just kind of in the clouds in terms of their expectations.*

Black men should be valued and good examples of Black couples should be out there.

One participant revealed that she believed images of Black couples were powerful and should be more prevalent.

Participant 10: *I guess as a Black woman like you know I'm not at all against interracial dating or relationships but I don't wanna give up on Black men either. I think they are valuable and should be valued and I think that, you know, I would love to continue forward with my current relationship and see other images of Black love and healthy images of Black love. I think it would be great just to have those examples out there so yeah, I love my Black men.*

They don't always value Black women. One participant stated that she believed Black men did not always value Black women.

Participant 5: *Sometimes they're not taught to value Black women that much...and how they look or their attitudes.*

14. Thoughts/feelings on the idea of never getting married. Consisted of 13 ideas

representing the various feelings participants had on the possibility of never getting married.

I would be sad and disappointed. This repeating idea was mentioned by 7 participants who shared that if they never got married they would be sad and disappointed.

Participant 4: *I don't think that not being married means I can't live and do the things that would be most meaningful to me. But I think there would be disappointment, I'll be disappointed, not think, I know I would be disappointed.*

Participant 8: *I'd probably be sad, because you know I just don't wanna...I wouldn't wanna date for the rest of my life. I would wanna have that person there you know to go to home to every night. I wouldn't wanna just date you know, I would probably be very sad.*

I would still desire companionship. Five participants indicated if they never got married they would still desire companionship and long for marriage.

Participant 3: *I always would seek someone to just kind of hang with or have a partner of some sort.*

I would be content because I would want to be with the right person rather than force it. This repeating idea was noted by 3 participants who mentioned that they would be content if they never got married because they would prefer to be single then force marriage and end up with the wrong person.

Participant 2: *You know I wouldn't want to just find somebody just to be with. Just for the purpose of being with them.*

I would be okay. Three participants stated that overall they would be okay if they never got married.

Participant 1: *I don't think I would be that sad, I mean, I have a good social circle...I have an extensive family that are very close.*

I would find joy in my other life goals. For this repeating idea, 3 participants expressed that they would seek joy by focusing on other life goals if they never got married.

Participant 4: *I think if I didn't get married I would still want to do all the things that I would do if I had been married, such as you know eventually traveling, making the money that I would want. I may even still have children if I never got married.*

I would learn to accept it. Two participants shared that if they never got married they would learn to accept it.

Participant 9: *I would learn to deal with it but I wouldn't be ecstatic about it.*

I would be lonely. This repeating idea was expressed by 2 participants who described that never getting married would be lonely for them.

Participant 2: *I think as people get older they kind of cling to their significant other, or their own kind of lives a little bit more so I may feel a little bit lonely in terms of, oh my friends are all married and who am I going to hang out with now that everyone's married?*

I let others down. Two participants indicated that if they never got married it would mean that they let people in their life down.

Participant 2: *I think it would mean that I had possibly failed some other people's standards in life, like my mother or my father....so I think they might have been disappointed. I don't think I would truly honestly be disappointed in my heart. I think I might feel judged.*

Participant 5: *I let God down?*

I would put more effort into my career. For this repeating idea, 2 participants stated that they would focus more on their career if they never got married.

Participant 10: *I think I would probably work harder career wise and neglect other areas to kind of not think about it.*

I would still try to have children. Two participants mentioned that if they never got married, they would still try to achieve their goals of being a mother.

Participant 1: *I would love to get married but if I don't, I don't think that I will just be alone for the rest of my life. I can still fulfill my other goals like being a mother and all that.*

Fear of being associated with the stereotype of women who are successful and aren't married or have children. One participant revealed that if she never got married it would mean she would be judged and upset because she would be categorized with other successful women who are not married and do not have children, which is not what she wants to be associated with.

Participant 6: *Yeah I would feel disappointed, I would. You know cause I guess it's also the stereotype about the women who are successful and they don't get married now and you know it's fine, its this new group of people now who don't wanna get married, don't wanna have children, and I do not wanna feel like I'm classified in that group.*

I would think something was wrong with me. One participant mentioned that never getting married would make her question and believe that something was wrong with her.

Participant 8: *If I never got married I probably would feel as if maybe something was wrong with me. Like what am I too picky? Am I too needy? Like what is it? Am I not just like crazy enough? Like wild and open? Like what is it? What is it about me that I'm not getting married? I would probably like doubt myself.*

I would marry for convenience rather than preference. For this idea, one participant

shared that she believed never getting married would not happen for her because if she could not marry based on her preferences, she would marry for convenience (i.e. money).

Participant 11: *I'm sure I'd eventually get married. If I couldn't marry according to my preferences, I would kind of make like a marriage of convenience.*

15. Marriage difficulty for Black women versus marriage difficulty for women of other racial groups. As previously mentioned, participants were asked their opinions on marriage difficulty for Black women compared to women of other racial groups. Ten participants (91%) indicated that they believed it was more difficult for Black women to find their preferred marriage partner than it was for women of other racial groups. This section consisted of 7 ideas shared by participants on the reasons why they believed that statement to be true or false.

Limited availability of partners; Limited availability of equivalent Black partners; Limited number of men who want to marry Black women. This repeating idea was noted by 9 participants who emphasized that finding a marriage partner was more difficult for Black women than it was for women of other races because they believed Black women had a limited number of partners available to them. Some participants extended this view, mentioning that in addition to a limited number of available men there were a limited number of Black men of similar backgrounds for them to marry and a limited number of Black men who actually wanted to marry Black women.

Participant 4: *Black men will date, well they're dating and will marry Black women, but more and more are dating and marrying White women or outside of their race, which is fine, but other races are not dating Black women, more and more are dating and marrying Asian, Latino, and White women so then in terms of the numbers of men that we can date and find a partner with....there's just fewer people.*

Participant 4: *I think it's harder because some of the things that we've done to advance ourselves to develop personally have been really great but then I think that sometimes puts us at a disadvantage in terms of people seeing us as viable options to partner with.*

Participant 5: *I have a lot friends with high educational aspirations and I just know a lot of Black women that have degrees and things like that and then it's like Black men, I don't think they're...I mean if you date people that are like yourself I don't think it's as many and then I think Black men know that....I've had my friends tell me it's a lot of good Black women out there, but you...for women y'all can't say the same.*

Participant 11: *I would say that in my generation a lot of Black males don't like Black women.....There really aren't enough Black men that want to marry them. Just numerically there aren't that many.*

Black women are less likely to date/marry interracialy. Five participants shared that finding a marriage partner was harder for Black women because Black women were less likely to marry outside of their race; therefore, limiting their choices and the pool of men available to them.

Participant 7: *At least from what I hear from my Black female friends, they limit themselves to only want to date within the same group.*

Participant 11: *I don't think Black women's preference on interracial dating are gonna change. I think if they were willing to marry exogamously a little bit more, I think they'd all get married pretty quickly. I mean I think if I was more willing to marry out I'd probably be married already.*

Notice more White peers getting married compared to Black women; Other ethnicities tend to be willing to commit. This repeating idea was noted by 4 participants who shared that their belief that finding a marriage partner was more difficult for Black women was based on their experiences and observations with seeing their White peers get married and their Black peers not getting married as often.

Participant 9: *I go off of everybody that I graduated with, my class, from high school...Majority of the White girls, White females are married or in the process of getting married and the majority of the Black females are not.*

Participant 10: *A lot of my like White friends are getting married or like have siblings who are getting married around my age maybe a little bit younger and like the other day I was like do they breed these White boys to just be like "alright, by 24 I'm gonna have to propose" cause like I think about it and you know we all have our young and wild days and I'm sure people, every race and ethnicity do that at some point in their life but it just seems like these White guys get it together, or maybe they don't have it together but they*

still know they have to propose. I don't know if there's like issues of infidelity and stuff like that in White marriages versus Black marriages, I'm not quite sure but it just seems like from the outside looking in like maybe they get it together a little earlier on.

Belief that educated Black men are limited and in high demand, which creates competition for Black women. Three participants indicated that finding a marriage partner was difficult for Black women because they believed that Black women faced more competition amongst each other for desirable Black men who are limited and in high demand.

Participant 3: But I have found, at least those men, a lot of them are not looking because they know that they are one of a few that are actually professional and make good money and so they are less willing to be in a relationship when they've got more women who are vying for them, so it becomes more competition.

Participant 7: I was thinking about how the same phenomenon plays out in the Ethiopian community where Ethiopian women are also more...there are more educated women, or highly educated women than there are men, that creates the spirit of competition.

Black women have a stigma/stereotype that makes them less sought after compared to women of other racial groups; Not always viewed as attractive. This repeating idea was mentioned by 2 participants who stated that Black women have a difficult time finding a marriage partner due to the stereotypes and stigmas associated with Black women and beauty, which they believed made Black women less sought after because they tend to not be viewed as attractive.

Participant 2: I don't feel currently that Black women are one of the highly sought after groups of people by other races....I think there are many more challenges because of media and stereotypes of Black women that maybe make people stay away when maybe they would have approached.

Participant 4: Interracial dating happens less frequently between Black women and men of other races than if researchers looking at attractiveness and what people deem as attractive, we tend to be on the bottom of the barrel in terms of, at least in terms of what people articulate. Our characteristics and our traits are allotted as being beautiful, big lips and you know more, being more voluptuous, but in terms of who's getting married, Black women are chosen less.

Pressure from society to find the right man in order to avoid stereotypes. One

participant revealed that she believed Black women have a difficult time finding a marriage partner due to pressure on them from society to find “the perfect man” in order to avoid the various stereotypes about Black women and their romantic relationships.

Participant 6: For us we don't want to be the stereotype. You don't wanna be the one who has a man who doesn't do anything and you take care of him. We already feel like the media portrays this or that, you know, we just don't wanna be that one.....we already have this mentality that we are the strong Black woman and we want the perfect man, we want this to work, it has to be right, it's our one chance to, you know get it right kind of thingthat's why I think it's more difficult for Black women, you already kind of have this burden on your back in a sense, not really a burden, but for some they feel like it's a burden of you have to find that right person and end up there.

It's not harder for Black women. One participant stated that she did not believe finding a marriage partner was more difficult for Black women because she believed Black women have a variety of options in terms of marriage partners.

Participant 8: As far as African American women we have a whole range of like who we can date and what we wanna do, I feel like so it shouldn't be as hard you know I feel like there's someone out there for everyone.

Appendix G – Extended Literature Review

According to Dixon (2009), African-Americans tend to be the least likely to get married compared to other racial groups. When African-Americans do marry, they marry later in life, and compared to White Americans, spend less time married and are more likely to divorce. A number of cultural, individual, and interactive factors are believed to contribute to this issue. There appears to be a discrepancy between the number of available African-American men to marry and the number of African-American women who are seeking marriage (Dixon, 2009). This discrepancy in the male to female ratio within the African-American population can make the pursuit of marriage challenging for African-American women compared to women of other racial groups.

Davis (2009), a correspondent with ABC News *Nightline*, compiled a segment that examined the topic of African-American women and marriage. The segment discussed the high prevalence of single college-educated Black women and reviewed the question of why some successful Black women were unable to find a man to marry (Davis, 2009; Johnson, 2010). The news segment emphasized a finding from a Yale study stating that compared to 23% of White women, the percentage of Black women who have never been married is 42% (Johnson, 2010). Unfortunately, the Yale study in question has not been properly cited, as the researchers of this study appear to be unknown. However, Nitsche and Brueckner (2011) from Yale University found in their study that 47% of highly educated Black women had never been married. This sample of women had some form of graduate education, were born in the 1960s, and were between the ages of 35 and 44.

Stanley (2011) argued that Black women have been the focus of what has been referred to as a “marriage crisis.” Harris-Perry (2013) discussed that this suggestion of a “marriage crisis”

began when *Nightline* aired a segment on the topic of Black women and marriage titled “Why Can’t a Successful Black Woman Find a Man?” In her book, she referenced the news segment’s claim that because 70% of professional Black women were not married that a crisis existed.

Although this notion may be true, Harris-Perry noted:

Nightline failed to call on any sociologist, psychologist, historian, or therapist who could have contributed context, statistics, or analysis about the “marriage crisis” among African Americans. Instead, these delicate and compelling issues were addressed by comedians, actors, bloggers, and journalists. Without structural analysis or evidence-based reasoning, the panel relied on personal experience (p. 291).

Homogamy theory proposes that individuals tend to marry and prefer partners who are similar to them on a number of different facets (Burgess & Wallin, 1943). This may create an issue for college-educated Black women who seek partners of the same educational and professional status, as the research tends to suggest that there is a shortage of available men for them to marry. An examination of this “marriage crisis” in relation to college-educated Black women is absent in the research; therefore, the discussed literature seeks to address the factors that may contribute to the lower marriage rates for Black women. This review also seeks to contribute to the understanding of the complex experiences of Black women seeking marriage partners, which may lead to important implications in the areas of Black women and health and marriage within the Black community.

Marriage Statistics

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2009 70.5% of Black women between the ages of 25 to 29 had never been married, compared to 41.6% of White women, 51.6% of Asian women and 36.8% of Hispanic women. These percentages decrease for Black women after

examining the age brackets of 30 to 34, 35 to 39, 40 to 44, 45 to 49, 50 to 54, and 55 and over; however, the percentage of never married Black women was still significantly higher at each age range in comparison to the never married percentages for women of other racial backgrounds (Kreider & Ellis, 2011; see Figure 1).

Percent Never Married for Women by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin, for Selected Years: 1986 to 2009

Year	25 to 29 years	30 to 34 years	35 to 39 years	40 to 44 years	45 to 49 years	50 to 54 years	55 and over
White							
1986	23.8	11.2	8.2	4.3	4.1	3.0	4.9
1996	30.8	14.8	11.2	7.7	6.0	4.6	3.8
2001	33.1	16.6	12.7	9.1	6.9	6.3	3.4
2004	36.7	18.2	12.5	10.4	8.3	7.3	4.5
2009	41.6	22.6	13.8	11.2	9.7	8.2	5.0
White, Non-Hispanic							
1986	24.0	11.3	8.2	3.8	4.2	2.6	4.8
1996	31.1	14.3	10.9	7.7	5.9	4.6	4.6
2001	34.1	17.1	12.3	9.0	7.1	5.9	3.1
2004	38.3	18.6	12.3	9.9	8.4	7.4	4.4
2009	43.3	22.0	13.5	10.3	9.4	7.8	4.7
Black							
1986	44.3	34.8	23.9	13.3	12.7	6.3	3.5
1996	57.7	39.4	33.6	25.0	15.9	11.7	6.6
2001	59.4	49.5	34.0	31.3	23.9	16.3	9.4
2004	66.3	47.0	39.0	30.3	28.5	18.0	10.9
2009	70.5	53.6	39.2	33.1	28.5	24.5	13.0
Asian							
1986	29.3	16.4	3.9	-	-	5.6	9.7
1996	41.5	18.4	4.6	3.1	7.8	7.9	5.7
2001	38.6	17.4	7.9	10.3	5.6	2.8	5.0
2004	39.0	25.7	19.7	16.2	8.4	9.8	4.4
2009	51.6	11.8	10.2	5.9	7.5	5.8	4.8
Hispanic							
1986	23.8	14.8	8.7	12.8	1.5	8.1	8.9
1996	30.5	19.5	13.3	9.0	8.9	7.5	7.2
2001	28.0	15.9	15.1	11.8	4.8	11.7	8.0
2004	32.0	16.7	14.7	16.3	8.6	6.6	6.7
2009	36.8	27.2	15.1	15.2	12.9	11.8	8.9

Figure 1. Percent never married for women by age, race, and Hispanic origin, for selected years: 1986 to 2009. Adapted from census.gov, by R. M. Kreider and R. Ellis, 2011, Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p70-125.pdf>.

Stanley (2011) argued that the 70.5% statistic of Black women that had never been married created a myth that Black women do not marry, as the statistic was misconstrued and individuals were neglecting to remember that the percentage was specific to Black women ages 25 to 29. Her argument was that Black women do get married, but they get married later in life. She discussed how it is logical for Black women to get married later in life since Black women are earning significantly more college degrees than Black men and with the majority of Black women preferring Black men as partners, this can create an issue of finding a partner of equal educational and professional status, especially while they are in their 20s (Stanley, 2011).

According to the 2011 U.S. Census Bureau, women with at least a Bachelor's degree are the most likely to get married, compared to women with some college, a high school diploma, and less than a high school diploma (Cruz, 2013). However, Clarke (2011) presented a different argument after examining 1995 data from The National Center for Health Statistics from the National Survey of Family Growth. She examined data that described marital percentages for women based on their race and education level during their reproductive period. Based on the data, although Black women who obtained a college degree were slightly more likely to marry than Black women with less than a college degree, Black women with a college degree were still less likely to marry compared to their White and Hispanic female counterparts who obtained less education (Clarke, 2011).

Additionally, Nitsche and Brueckner (2009) found that "Black women are twice as likely as White women to never have married by age 45 and twice as likely to be divorced, widowed, or separated" (pp.1-2). They analyzed data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population

Survey for the period of 1970 to 2007 to describe marriage and family trends among Black women with postgraduate degrees and found that fewer Black women with postgraduate degrees are getting married and having children. Overall, they argued that marriage and family are on the decline for highly educated Black women (Nitsche & Brueckner, 2009).

In general, marriage trends have lowered substantially since the 1950s and are currently at a record low; yet, the decline in marriage frequency for women of Hispanic and Black racial/ethnic groups has been more dramatic. The decline has had the biggest impact on Black and Hispanic women, who have experienced 60% and 33% declines in marriage, respectively. As of 2010 among the racial/ethnic groups, Black women accounted for the lowest proportion of women who are married at 26%, compared to 43% of Hispanic women, 51% of White women, and 56% of Asian women (Cruz, 2013). This information provides support for the notion that Black women may have a unique experience in terms of marriage opportunities, compared to their female counterparts from other racial groups and of similar educational statuses.

Career, Marriage, and Family Aspirations and Attitudes

Career, Marriage, and Family Aspirations

Could the marriage statistics supporting a decline in marriage among Black women simply represent a lack of desirability among Black women to become married? Bronzaft (1991) examined the attitudes, goals, and interests Black women had about career, marriage, and children. The results provided some empirical support for Black women's intentions regarding marriage and career. Bronzaft (1991) found that Black female college students, compared to White and Hispanic female college students, had similar attitudes regarding having career, marriage, and family. One-hundred and ten Hispanic women, 54 Black women, and 65 White women, ages 17-25, who attended the same college were surveyed, with the majority of the

participants being freshmen. When participants were asked about their desire to pursue study beyond the bachelor's degree, 69% of Black women indicated a desired to do so, compared to 63% of White women and 78% of Hispanic women. In terms of their desire to be married career women and/or married career women with children, 89% of Black women indicated such a desire, compared to 94% of White women and 86% of Hispanic women. When asked about their desire to be unmarried career women, 7% of Black women indicated such a desire, compared to 3% of White women and 0% of Hispanic women (Bronzaft, 1991).

Porter and Bronzaft (1995) further advanced Bronzaft's (1991) study and surveyed 70 unmarried Black female college students, ages 17-25, who were enrolled at two different college campuses. More than one-half of the participants were under the age of 21. Seventy-nine percent of the participants indicated a desire to pursue study beyond the bachelor's degree, 73% desired to be married career women and/or married career women with children, while 15% desired to be unmarried career women (Porter & Bronzaft, 1995). Overall, the findings of these two studies indicated that the majority of Black female college students desired to pursue education beyond the bachelor's level, desired to be married career women with children, but there were more Black women who desired to be unmarried career women compared to their White and Hispanic female counterparts. Although these two studies are 20 years old, no other research appears to contradict their findings, so if research supports that the majority of Black women desire to be married, what is contributing to the majority of them being unmarried? Answers to these questions can provide an outlook into the declining marriage rates for Black women.

Marriage Attitudes

The previously discussed literature emphasizes how the majority of Black women desire to be married, but what exactly are their attitudes towards marriage? Hatchett (1991) found that

of the African-American respondents surveyed, both men and women were uncertain about marriage based on “so few good marriages” (pg. 100). On the other hand, Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1995) inquired about the importance of marriage for African-Americans. Female respondents on average scored 7.1 on a scale of 1 to 10 regarding marital importance, with 10 being extremely important. Additionally of the female respondents, 72.4% noted that they desired to marry or remarry, if they were currently divorced or separated (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).

King (1999) examined the marital attitudes of 317 African American female adults, who were well-educated and middle aged, and had income levels above the median of most African American women. Generally the results were mixed, but the majority of the respondents believed that marriage helped with individual maturity and growth and that a successful career should be more important than a successful marriage. However, women who had never been married believed that a successful career was more important to them than a successful marriage. Respondents who were older and married expressed more positive attitudes than those who were younger and never-married, while respondents who were educated with higher incomes expressed more positive attitudes toward marriage than those who were less educated with lower incomes (King, 1999).

Overall, these studies suggest that African-American women tend to view marriage as important and valuable towards personal growth, while some may prefer to be single as they are unsure about marriage, or may value career over marriage. Additionally, well-educated African-American women tended to express positive attitudes toward marriage. This information provides support for Black women valuing and having positive attitudes towards marriage, yet continues to demonstrate the complexity of the declining marriage rates since the statistics show

that the majority of Black women are unmarried despite their desires to become married and positive attitudes toward marriage.

Characteristics of the Ideal Marriage Partner

With the above literature suggesting that Black women are less likely to become married, along with research to support that Black women desire to become married, it is important to examine what characteristics Black women desire in a marriage partner to gain an understanding of how their preferences may impact their marriage outcome. In Porter and Bronzaft (1995)'s study, they surveyed Black women on their dating partner, and potential marriage partner preferences.

They found that the majority of Black women reported dating partners who were either in college or college graduates, with 85% indicating that their most rewarding and fulfilling dating experiences had been with Black men. Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated that they did not date men from other racial/ethnic groups and 87% reported that they were most willing to marry Black men, with 1% indicating a preference for White men, 4% for Hispanic men, 2% for Asian men, and 2% indicating other preferences (Porter & Bronzaft, 1995). According to Banks (2011), compared to Black men, Black women are less likely to enter into an interracial relationship. It was also noted that Black women are more likely to “marry across class lines, but not race lines (p. 3),” meaning that Black women seem to be more willing to “marry down” in social class than marry outside of their race. In general, they continue to prefer Black men and would rather remain single than date outside of their race (Banks, 2011).

King and Allen (2007) surveyed 344 African-American men and women regarding the characteristics of their ideal marriage partner. Participants in the study on average were in their 30s, had obtained 14.7 years of education, and had a mean income of \$27,866. In general, their

findings indicated that African-American men and women preferred “well-educated, financially stable, monogamous, and affluent partners who are spiritual, religious, self-confident, and reliable” (pg. 570). African-American men and women valued personality in a marriage partner, as well as a partner who is honest, caring, spiritual, committed and affectionate. Participants also wanted their ideal marriage partner to earn significantly more money than they earned. Taking into consideration the actual income of the respondent and the desired income of their ideal partner, the respondents tended to prefer partners with incomes that would assist them in obtaining or sustaining a middle-class lifestyle. Additionally, the respondents indicated a preference for partners who had completed 15.1 years of education (King & Allen, 2007).

These studies taken together suggest that Black women have a preference for Black men as marriage partners, who are also well-educated and obtain incomes equivalent to middle-class status. Despite these preferences, it has been argued that compared to college-educated women of other races, college-educated Black women are more likely to marry a less-educated man who earns less money than they do. Additionally, it has been found that of married Black women who have graduated from college, more than half of them married a man who was less-educated (Banks, 2011). This may illustrate the difficulty college-educated Black women face when it comes to decisions regarding marriage and the preferences they may have to sacrifice in order to find a marriage partner.

Views of Black Men

Despite the research findings suggesting that Black women prefer Black men as marriage partners, there appear to be a number of less than desirable views Black women have about Black men. This can provide additional insight into the issue of marriage within the Black community. Porter and Bronzaft’s (1995) study examined Black female college students attitudes

of Black males and men of other racial groups and found that 50% of them believed “Black men of comparable educational statuses had a difficult time committing to permanent relationships” (p. 167), whereas 32% disagreed with this notion, and only 45% of Black women responded that the Black men they had dated were trustworthy. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents who indicated dating men of other racial/ethnic groups in addition to Black men, reported that they believed men of other racial groups were more willing to commit to permanent relationships than the Black men whom they had dated. These findings may suggest that commitment and trust are issues for Black women in their relationships with Black men and they may be more likely to tolerate these characteristics in a dating partner, but not a marriage partner, which may heavily impact their single marital status (Porter & Bronzaft, 1995).

Banks (2011) interviewed Black women and also found themes relating to the issue of monogamous relationships. Black women have reported that meeting men was not the problem, but the problem was finding men who were willing to be exclusive. Some Black women have felt as though Black men have taken advantage of the high numbers of available Black women, which they believe has resulted in men viewing the single life as alluring and not wanting to rush into marriage. The prevalence of nonmonogamous relationships aligns with the concept of man sharing, which refers to African-American women who engage in sexual relationships with men who are involved in other concurrent relationships, where the women involved may or may not be aware (Airhihenbuwa, DiClemente, Wingood, & Lowe, 1992; Banks, 2011).

Overall the imbalance appears to favor men, leaving Black men with more of the power when it comes to negotiating a relationship (Banks, 2011). The sex-ratio imbalance issue may make Black women feel as though they lack power in their relationships and they may feel a sense to compete against other women, which may make them more likely to accept infidelity,

settle for less desirable partners, and engage in unprotected sex (Bowleg, Lucas, & Tschann 2004). The prevalence of nonmonogamous relationships and the concept of man sharing has important implications for the health of Black women, as it can increase their likelihood of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (Banks, 2011; Newsome, 2013). The discussed issues are key in understanding the dilemma Black women may face in their relationships and decisions about marriage, in addition to their views concerning trust and commitment from Black men.

Holland (2009) conducted a study with 25 single African-American mothers who were currently pursuing their undergraduate degree and inquired about their decisions to remain single. These single African-American mothers revealed that their decisions to remain single were influenced by their poor relationships with their child/children's biological father, which negatively impacted their desire to marry and their levels of trust and intimacy. Some reported feeling as though they did not possess the necessary skills required for marriage, as well as a lack of knowledge regarding what committed relationships should entail. The women also reported that pursuing their career goals, an unwillingness to commit to one person, difficulty in meeting men who wanted to marry, previous poor relationships (some which consisted of violence and disrespect) and meeting men who only wanted sex, contributed to their decisions to remain single (Holland, 2009). These findings suggest that Black women struggle with issues related to trust, poor past relationships, and a lack of commitment from Black men, which are important factors to consider when examining their likelihood to become married. These findings may also provide answers regarding marriage difficulty, their attitudes towards Black men, and their beliefs about why they are single.

One qualitative study examined the opinions of married Black men, asking them why they believed that Black women were disproportionately single. Findings from this study

indicated that poor gender relations between Black men and women, Black women's difficulties with the way they go about attracting a man, Black male incarceration, the "strong, independent woman" attitude, and men not taking care of their responsibilities were key reasons for the high prevalence of nonmarried Black women. Issues of trust, challenges with job stability, the view that marriage wasn't as valued, overall readiness from men and women to be married, and the prevalence of homosexuality between men and women were also mentioned as influential factors (Hurt, McElroy, Sheats, Landor & Bryant, 2014). These results suggest that from the perspective of married Black men, Black men have various issues that negatively impact a Black women's likelihood to become married; however, these findings also suggest that the disproportionately low marriage rates for Black women can also be attributed to Black women and various issues they may bring to their relationships.

A "Shortage" of "Marriageable" Black Men

The previously discussed *Nightline* segment covering the issue of marriage among professional Black women argued they were not getting married because of a shortage of "marriageable" African-American men, or the possibility of Black women having high standards (Davis, 2009). King and Allen (2007) defined "marriageable" as "men who possess the social or economic characteristics that Black women seek in a marriage partner" (p. 571). With the research findings suggesting that Black women want to be married and desire Black men as marriage partners, a shortage of "marriageable" Black men appears to be a key reason for why many of them are still single.

Sex Ratio Imbalance

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are "1.8 million more Black women than Black men" (Davis, 2009; Johnson, 2010). To further support this, King and Allen (2007) examined

2002 U.S. Census data and found that the ratio of Black men to Black women was 81 to 100 aged 20-44. Unfortunately, if every Black woman in America wanted to get married to a Black man, the numbers suggest that there simply are not enough to go around, leaving one out of twelve Black women single (Davis, 2009). To complicate matters, if you take 100 Black men, “By the time you eliminate those without a high school diploma (21%), the unemployed (17%), and those ages 25-34 who are incarcerated (8%), you only have 54% of Black men left whom many Black women find acceptable” (Davis, 2009). These factors continue to influence the decreasing marriage availability pool for Black women.

Higher Education and the Black Community

According to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2007), Black women outnumber Black men in various fields of higher education. Black women earn about 70 percent of all masters degrees, more than 60 percent of all doctorates, and of the bachelor degree's earned by African-Americans, Black women earn about two-thirds of them. Additionally, Black women make up the majority of enrollments in law, medical, and dental schools for the African-American population (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2007). These statistics can be concerning when considering the above literature that discusses Black women's preference for a Black male partner who is of similar educational status and/or professional status. Additionally, Bronzaft (1991) reported that Black female students have discussed the concern regarding finding college-educated mates in educational settings, providing support that they may view this disparity as a serious issue.

It has been argued that as a Black woman's level of completed education increases, the number of men available to them decreases (South & Lloyd, 1992; Tucker & Taylor, 1989). Marriott (1990) argued that with Black women continuing to outnumber Black men in higher

education there is concern about a socioeconomic gap between Black women and Black men. With this in mind, what does this mean for educated Black women who may want a partner of a similar educational status?

Incarceration and Unemployment

In addition to the discrepancies in educational attainment that influence mate availability, incarceration and unemployment contribute to the shortage as well. Out of all adult Black males, in 2001, 16.6% had been incarcerated (Bonczar, 2003). This was twice the percentage of Hispanic males and six times the percentage of White males (Bonczar, 2003; King & Allen, 2007). Additionally, 33% of Black men are expected to be sentenced to prison at least once in their lifetime (Bonczar, 2003). Furthermore, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, 6% percent of the U.S. population consists of African-American males, yet the prison population is made up of over 50% of African-American men (as cited in Dixon, 2009).

The exclusion and marginalization of African-American men in the labor force has also contributed to the lack of desirability to have them as marriage partners. Since the 1940s, compared to the unemployment rate of White men, the unemployment rate of Black males has doubled. This economic factor is important because an unemployment status for Black men equates to not being able to be a financial provider for their families, which can make them unappealing to women as marriage partners (Dixon, 2009). In general, the lack of Black men compared to Black women who are available for marriage is strongly related to many Black men being troubled by criminal history and a lack of economic resources (King & Allen, 2007).

Black Men “Marrying Out”

“Black men are between two and three times as likely as Black women to marry someone of a different race” (Banks, 2011, pg. 33), while Black women are less likely to date outside of

their race due to a preference for marrying Black men (Banks, 2011; Porter & Bronzaft, 1995). The decline in marriage rates among Black women has coincided with an increase in interracial marriage rates between Black men and non-Black women, more specifically White women, and this significantly impacts the marriage prospects of Black women. U.S. Census data from 1990 found that of the nation's married Black men, 4.5% had non-Black spouses, with the majority being married to White women. Data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) reported that Black men married to non-Black women obtained higher incomes than Black men married to Black women (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000). Generally, Black men who were married to non-Black women tended to have "higher income, education, occupational prestige, and rates of employment when compared with Black men married to Black women" (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000, pg. 804).

Banks (2011) argued that Black women often feel hurt when Black men date or marry White women. This apparently has made them feel "unappreciated, inadequate, and unwanted" (pg. 34). Black women believe that successful Black men are more likely to marry White women who are less educated and of lower status, which sociologists explain as "status exchange." This notion proposes that Black men benefit from their spouse's whiteness and their White spouse in return benefits from his educational and professional achievements (Banks, 2011). These findings suggest that the Black men who Black women view as socioeconomically attractive are more likely to engage in interracial marriage, removing these more desirable men from the marriage pool.

The sex-ratio imbalance, underrepresentation of Black men in higher education, overrepresentation of Black men who are incarcerated and unemployed, and the prevalence of desirable Black men marrying outside of their race suggest key contributing issues to decreased

mate availability for Black women. These various elements may help explain the lower marriage rates for Black women and may contribute to their beliefs concerning their single status.

Mate Selection Theory: Homogamy

Social homogamy theory proposes that people will be most attracted to those who are from similar social and cultural backgrounds. This includes race, age, ethnic background, religion, socioeconomic status, political views, and physical characteristics. Additionally, individuals tend to marry those who are similar to them socially and culturally (Burgess & Wallin, 1943; Kalmihn, 1998). There are strong benefits for marrying people who are socially similar to oneself, as research findings indicate that homogamy is a key factor in marriage and partnership, and homogamy within a partnership tends to reduce stress levels (Brynin, Longhi, & Perez, 2008).

Typically, as relationships advance from dating to cohabitation to marriage, homogamy tends to increase (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004). This provides a key distinction in what individuals deem appropriate for marriage, as “cohabitators may be more likely to live with partners that they are less sure about; that they do not intend to marry, or for whom there are normative pressures against marrying” (Schwartz, 2010, pg. 735). Compared to married couples, cohabiting couples are less likely to be homogamous (Schwartz, 2010), suggesting that homogamy is valued more in a marriage. Overall, Blackwell and Lichter (2004) argued that partners who are homogeneous move toward marriage, while dating and cohabiting relationships that are heterogeneous tend to end, a result of what Blackwell and Lichter call the “winnowing process.”

Shafer and Qian (2010) discussed educational homogamy and how this concept helps explain the “social boundaries men and women are willing to cross in the marriage markets,”

especially when looking for socioeconomically attractive partners (pg. 661). Schwartz (2010) argued that the marriages that are most likely to end are those that cross educational boundaries. Level of educational attainment influences one's standing and potential in the marriage market as it makes one more attractive to potential partners. A number of factors go into what makes one attractive as a marriage partner, but socioeconomic status tends to stand out as being the most important. So in hindsight, men and women may prefer marrying individuals who are highly educated, which often leads to marriages that are economically stable (Shafer & Qian, 2010).

The theory of homogamy helps put into perspective the marital preferences of individuals, in addition to the marital preferences of college-educated Black women. With the research findings suggesting that finding such homogamy may be difficult for this population, this theory helps illustrate the impasse college-educated Black women face when attempting to find a preferred marriage partner. A dichotomy exists between what they desire and what is realistically available, further contributing to lower marriage rates.

Well-Being, Health, Life Satisfaction and Marriage

Understanding the complexities involved in the marriage process for Black women helps one understand how this diminished likelihood to marry can impact their well-being, health, and life satisfaction. Borzumato-Gainey, Kennedy, McCabe, and Degges-White (2009) found that married or partnered women had higher levels of life satisfaction compared to single women. Coombs (1991) examined 130 empirical studies and found that married men and women tended to be happier, healthier, and less stressed than those who were not married. Married men and women were also at a reduced risk for suicide, alcoholism, and mortality compared to their counterparts who were unmarried (Coombs, 1991).

Additionally, among the Black population, levels of satisfaction are significantly impacted by both marital and parental status. Blacks who were married were more satisfied with life than those who were divorced or separated (Browman, 1998). Ball (1983) “found that married, widowed, and divorced women had the highest life satisfaction, while single and separated women were less satisfied” (pg. 400). It has been argued that happiness and life satisfaction are factors that are important to mental health, as well as predictors of subjective well-being. Researchers have indicated that when individuals experienced long-term life dissatisfaction, this was related to poor mental health and more specifically, major depressive disorder (Rissanen et al., 2011). Life dissatisfaction has also been found to be a predictor of mortality, as well as a risk factor for general health (Koivumaa-Honkanen et al., 2010). Therefore, if never married college-educated Black women are more likely to experience life dissatisfaction than women who are married, it is possible that this decreased life satisfaction can increase their risk for mental health problems.

Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan (1998) noted that in relation to mental well-being, it is not marriage that is important, but the quality of the marital relationship. This notion puts into perspective the importance college-educated Black women place on their preferences in a partner because if Black women are unable to find what they consider to be a quality marriage partner, it could impact their levels of satisfaction.

Stutzer and Frey (2006) discussed various research findings in support for marriage and the positive impact it can have on health. The institution of marriage has been viewed as beneficial based on the benefits that come from love, companionship, and even financial rewards (Stutzer & Frey, 2006). There appear to be therapeutic benefits to marriage, as marriage tends to enhance the emotional, psychological, and physical well being of adults. This is also known as

the protection/support hypothesis, which argues that due to a lack of companionship with a partner, unmarried individuals are more likely than married individuals to experience physical and emotional distress (Coombs, 1991).

Reflecting on physical and emotional distress and health, there are a number of health disparities between African Americans and other racial groups. Fongwa et al. (2008) discussed the high prevalence of hypertension among African American women, which is the leading cause of heart disease and stroke among African American women. These illnesses are impacting Black women at disproportional rates and in addition to factors such as poverty, poor diet and other health behaviors, it is also believed that environmental factors play a role in the high prevalence of hypertension among Blacks, such as stress (Fuchs, 2011).

Additionally, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) presented the notion of “shifting” in their African American Woman Voices Project. They described shifting as a change that occurs amongst Black women in which they shift “White” and shift “Black” throughout their lives in order to avoid negative bias and bigotry. Ultimately, “shifting” may occur when Black women feel pressure to adjust and hide their true identities. Relating their research to the present study, their participants consisted of primarily heterosexual college-educated Black women. The researchers argued how Black women spend significant energy dealing with racial and gender bias, especially in the workplace and “shifting” among Black women in order to fit or survive their environment can trigger negative health outcomes such as hypertension, obesity, and depressive symptoms (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Overall, research findings in general argue that people who are married are healthier. The declining marriage rates for Black women point to an issue suggesting that Black women, especially those who desire to become married, may not be reaping the benefits associated with

marriage. Marriage is argued to be a protective factor based on the companionship it can provide and the idea of having someone to assist with loneliness and emotional support to cope with stress. Therefore, the decreased likelihood for college-educated Black women to become married can have important implications for their overall well-being, health, and life satisfaction.

General Integrated Summary

The above literature highlights a marriage trend pointing towards a decreased likelihood for Black women to become married compared to their White and Hispanic female counterparts. Research findings indicate that Black women in general desire to become married, preferring Black men who are well-educated and have incomes equivalent to a middle-class lifestyle. However, despite their preference for Black men as marriage partners, Black women display negative attitudes towards Black men that could impact marriage outcomes between the two groups. This involves Black men's difficulty in committing to relationships and Black women's lack of trust in Black men. Consequently, findings from the perspective of married Black men have noted that the disproportionately low marriage rates for Black women are not simply due to problems with Black men, but can also be attributed to the various issues that Black women negatively contribute to their relationships.

A good portion of the literature tends to emphasize the disparity between available Black men and Black women as a potential cause for the "marriage crisis" within the Black community. The argument has surrounded the notion that there is a sex ratio imbalance between Black women and men. Furthermore, this decreased availability of men has become complicated by issues related to an overrepresentation of Black women in higher education in comparison to Black men, in addition to the high prevalence of Black men who are incarcerated and unemployed. Research findings also highlight that the already limited marriage pool starts to

become increasingly more reduced when Black men who are desired by Black women tend to marry outside of their race, which impacts the marriage prospects of Black women even more.

With the pool of “marriageable” Black men being limited, it presents a unique predicament not just for Black women but for college-educated Black women as well, as they are likely to prefer Black male partners who are of a similar educational status. However, the marriage statistics suggest that college-educated Black women outnumber the men they seek. On the other hand, research findings have shown that Black women are more likely to desire to be unmarried career women in comparison to their White and Hispanic female counterparts, and it is hypothesized that the shortage of “marriageable” men contributes to this decision.

By examining the mate selection theory of homogamy, one begins to understand the marital preferences of Black women and the impasse this can create for college-educated Black women who long for marriage partners who are similar to them. Moreover, research findings suggest that overall individuals who are married are happier, healthier, have higher levels of life satisfaction. Since marriage has been argued to be a protective factor and provide emotional, psychological and physical benefits to adults, the decreased likelihood to marry raises important implications for this population’s health, especially considering the health disparities Black women experience with hypertension, heart disease, and stroke, as they may not be acquiring some of the health-related benefits associated with marriage.

All of these factors underline key elements in the experiences of Black women, but more empirical research is needed, as the discussed literature tends to be conceptual. Future research is needed to examine the marital preferences of college-educated Black women who have never been married and address this population’s viewpoint on the issues that are contributing to their current marital status. The information could be vital for developing appropriate counseling

and/or community interventions focused on addressing some of the issues relating to the decline in marriage rates within the Black community and the implications this issue has on the lives of Black women.

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Appendix I – Institutional Review Board Approval Form



Office of Research Integrity
 Institutional Review Board (IRB)
 2000 University Avenue
 Muncie, IN 47306-0155
 Phone: 765-285-5070

DATE: February 18, 2015

TO: Lamarra Currie, M.Ed.

FROM: Ball State University IRB

RE: IRB protocol #665012-2

TITLE: An Exploration of the Marital Preferences of Heterosexual College-Educated Black Women: A Qualitative Examination

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED

DECISION DATE: February 18, 2015

REVIEW TYPE: EXEMPT

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on February 18, 2015 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

Exempt Categories:

	Category 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
	Category 2: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior
	Category 3: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under category 2, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the

	research and thereafter.
	Category 4: Research involving the collection of study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
	Category 5: Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of Department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under these programs.
	Category 6: Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed which contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Editorial Notes:

1. Modification Approved

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. **Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project.** Please contact (ORI Staff) if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (<http://www.bsu.edu/irb>) for review. Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

Reminder: Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), you and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.

Bryan Byers, PhD/Chair
Institutional Review Board

Christopher Mangelli, JD, MS, MEd, CIP/Director
Office of Research Integrity